Positive Alternative to Shelter Surrender (P.A.S.S.) Program

Making America No-Kill
General Description
The Pass Program seeks out ways to help keep pets of the public out of the shelter by providing resources, education and sometimes by placing ads for people who are unable to do it for themselves.

Austin Pets Alive!’s P.A.S.S in-shelter numbers over the last year
The following shows how the in-shelter staff have succeeded in getting people to consider rehoming their pets via the methods outlined by P.A.S.S instead of turning them over to the local shelter:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>People that came to surrender at the Shelter</th>
<th>Number Surrendered</th>
<th>Percentage that were still surrendered</th>
<th>Percentage that were rehomed</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>November, 2010</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>74.67%</td>
<td>25.33%</td>
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<td>December, 2010</td>
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<td>72.73%</td>
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<td>September, 2011</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>88.24%</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
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Critical Steps to putting a PASS program in place

Good Working Relationship With Shelter Staff & Volunteers:
The most critical first steps in setting up a Pass Program are establishing a good working relationship with the shelter, familiarizing yourself with their policies and procedures and then educating yourself on all the resources you intend to provide.

From the shelter aspect it is important to set up some place separate from, but close to the surrender or intake office. You should be the first person people see when they come to surrender a pet. Ideally this should be before they get into the actual room where the pets are surrendered and away from the shelter staff who do intake because once inside that area it is too easy to bypass the person doing Pass and just get in the surrender line. If they have to actually speak to you before they can surrender they are more likely to give you their attention and to accept your help.

Hotline and Email Program:
The second step is to set up an email and phone hotline and you can do this through Google mail and Google voice. All of the emails and voicemails will come into Google mail and can be handled from there. It is a good idea to put
an outgoing message on the voicemail encouraging people to email and only leave a voicemail in the case of an immediate emergency like a sick animal, etc.

**Google Voice**

http://www.google.com/voice/

When you setup google voice, you can get a phone number that will go straight to voice mail and email you and your team with the message left by the caller. It also attempts to transcribe the voice mail so you can read what the person left in their message, though sometimes it doesn't do a very good job. Luckily there is a link to play the message via audio right in the email. Here is an example of an email received from the Austin Pets Alive! P.A.S.S hotline:

On Wed, Aug 31, 2011 at 8:53 AM, Google Voice <voice-noreply@google.com> wrote:

Voicemail from: 

Hi, I found a stray dog in the the street he's been hit by a car but he may have been hit a while ago so he has a little limp but he's a sweet little dog and a sweet personality and he gets along with other dogs. My name is Joe, and my number is 239 2391 2392 2393 I'm here in Austin. thanks bye.

Play message

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Volunteers to man the hotline and be at the shelter:

Pass Volunteers need to have more people skills than animal skills. Most of your interaction will be with people of all ages and personalities, some nice and some not so nice. Some who care about their pets and some who view them as nothing more than lawn ornaments. A Pass volunteer has to remain tactful, educational, and professional with each client. Not doing so can sometimes make things worse for the pets involved.

Who are the key players in PASS and what are their duties

Both your hotline volunteers and your shelter volunteers need to have good people skills. They also need to be able to handle sad and sometimes aggravating situations in a professional manner.

Hotline Volunteers

People who can commit 4 or more hours at a time, one or more days per week on a consistent basis to the hotline.

Shelter Volunteers

People who commit to at least 3-4 hours at a time, one or more days per week at the shelter.

Network & Resources

Some of your main key players will be your network. I found, created, and then maintained a relationship with good facebook rescue pages and reliable rescue people who help me daily. I did this by going to their pages and sites and responding to their needs. Once you create a network of respectable rescue people you have hit gold!
Why you need volunteers with people skills (aka there are no happy calls and emails on PASS!!)

Every call and email a Pass volunteer gets, and ever person a Pass volunteer meets at the shelter either wants to surrender an animal, has a sick animal, knows of or has an abused animal, or has some sort of unhappy situation. Pass Volunteers must have a thick skin. You can be angry in your head but it cannot come out of your mouth. How you handle a Pass client can directly determine how that client handles the animal in need.

Some of the things you may run into are:

- Abused animals
- Neglected animals
- Rude and uncaring owners
- Owners who threaten to shoot or do harm to their animals
- Owners who are either physically or mentally ill.

You must have volunteers who can handle all of these owners and their situations in a non-judgmental and professional manner.

Most successful aspects of the PASS program

Re-homing pets through ads:

We have had an enormous amount of success on the hotline and at the shelter in re-homing pets so they never have to enter the shelter system. On the hotline we ask that people send us pictures and behavior info on their pet so we can place ads and postings. Our ads go out on craigslist, facebook, to listserv’s and to different rescues.

Check out the rescues and sanctuaries you contact thoroughly!

Not all rescues and animal sanctuaries are created equal. If you have not visited these places yourself you need to contact people who have and make sure they are safe, well run facilities. Don’t operate on the “I heard they were wonderful” recommendations. I recently sent a dog to someone who came highly recommended to me by a rescuer I have great respect for and who had known this lady for years. Later I found out my friend had only known her through phone conversations and facebook posts and this woman was actually overwhelmed and nearly to hoarder status. The dog was removed luckily, but it taught me a valuable lesson.

Beware of the crazy Facebook people!

If you are going to place ads on facebook be prepared to baby-sit them. I have people from all over replying to my ads, trying to transport my dogs to Canada and out of state. These people will talk amongst themselves and be arranging transports before I even have time to screen them. This is true with rescue facebook posts as well and people will be calling the shelter from out of state and out of the country to adopt, inundating the shelter with calls that are not welcomed and can adversely affect your working relationship with them.

You also have to beware of hoarders and abusers on the rescue sites. Everyone wants to trust people simply because they are posting on a rescue page and you can’t do that. I still ask for references and I will want to “friend” them and check out their page before even talking to them about a dog. You can tell a lot about a person from their facebook page!
Temporary boarding for emergencies:
We have had further success with finding temporary boarding for pets of people in hospice, people in domestic violence situations, and more that have kept pets out of the shelter and in some instances kept them from being euthanized.

Keeping pets out of the shelter by offering food and medical assistance:
Additionally we have been able to save pets from the shelter by offering people free dog or cat food, free litter, kennels or crates, and low cost medical treatment through our community hospital.

Keeping pets out of the shelter by offering training resources
Another great avenue for keeping pets out of the shelter has been a program called The Schrodi Fund that people here can apply for and if they are approved it gives them free training for their pets. This has kept a lot of behavior cases out of the shelter. We also have a list of training facilities in our area that are low cost and specialize in aggression cases.

Obstacles to overcome

People who want a quick fix
For us, most of our obstacles came from people who simply wanted a quick fix and expected us to take their pet. This is still an obstacle so it has to be overcome daily by making people believe there is indeed a solution and that they can be a part of it. Getting people on your side and the side of the animal is key. By the time people call our hotline or show up in the shelter parking lot they are pretty much committed to giving up the pet and getting them to rethink that concept is a practiced skill. We have found that the more respect we give the person, the more the person will give the animal. If you make someone defensive or angry it is always the pet that suffers.

No Resources For People In Emergency Situations
We solved a lot of our resource issues when we were able to secure temporary boarding for people, when we created our community hospital, and when we were able to offer people free food and litter.

Found Dogs and Cats
It seemed almost hopeless for the found dogs and cats that came into the shelter on a daily basis until we started taking pics of them before people surrendered and quickly put up a lost & found ad on craigslist. This started bringing people to the shelter to find and reclaim their pets.

Obstacles on the hotline and at the shelter

Feral cats are killing my birds, in my garden, terrorizing my house cats, etc.
Alley Cat Allies is the best resource ever for educating people about feral cats. They have printer friendly pages you can take to the shelter with you to hand out to people and they completely dispel all the myths about feral cat and address all the problems mentioned above.
Online resources
Cat resources:

- http://www.alleycat.org

I’m moving (tomorrow) and can’t take my dog/cat or I’m moving and can’t pay my pet deposit
If a person calls the hotline or brings their cat or dog to the shelter saying they are moving tomorrow and can’t take their pet I usually try and see if there isn’t a friend, family member, etc, who can keep the pet a few days to give me time to re-home thru ads and postings. This is usually easier on the hotline than at the shelter because by the time people get to the shelter they are resigned and committed to giving up that animal right then. They have already begun to divorce themselves emotionally from the situation and to ask them to take the animal back with them will make it necessary to re-commit.

If the surrender is due to a pet deposit that can’t be paid I ask the person if they have spoken to their landlord about paying the deposit out. I also ask if they would like me to call their landlord and advocate for them and see if I can get him or her to agree to that.

I might also suggest they ask each of their friends and family to donate $20 each to their pet deposit. If they can come up with at least $100 of it the landlord will usually agree to let them pay the rest out.

In the case of a little dog named Bevo who showed up at the shelter I set up a chip-in account on a facebook rescue page I use and raised the owner’s $300 pet deposit in exactly 25 minutes.

My cat is peeing on me (and my clothes, bed, floor, etc.)
We have a cat behaviorist I consult with on these types of problems but I finally started saving her responses so I wouldn’t have to bother her and then copying and pasting the parts that applied to each person’s situation into replies. There is a wealth of information out there on cats that pee outside the litter box, from checking them for a URI, to changing the type of litter, type of litter box, to certain household changes that can cause cats to divert such as divorce, bringing in a new pet, etc.

My Toddlers pull my Chihuahua’s ears and he’s biting them!

Dogs 101…sometimes people just need educated on dog breeds (and on kids) and I have heard this excuse more than once for needing to re-homing a dog.

Training the PASS volunteers
I have found that the best avenue for training the hotline volunteers is to let them into the email and phone lines and have them read our responses for 2-3 days before attempting their first shift. Along with this I send them the canned responses I wrote to help with different Pass situations.
Training the shelter volunteers involves having someone shadow me at the shelter for a week to let them get a feel of what it’s like to be there on a daily basis, how to deal with different situations, etc. Because there is a process a person has to go through to get approved to sit at the shelter I want to make sure the person really wants to commit before moving forward.

**Keeping good volunteers**

Pass is a tough place to volunteer. Because of the nature of the calls and emails coming in the Pass volunteers need to stay connected and have a place to vent and let off some steam so they don’t burn out. Have a Pass Party for your volunteers! Once a month or so get your group together, meet for drinks or dinner and just hang out...

Use this time to get closer as a volunteer group, to chill out and to vent about the situations you have come across that month with people who will understand and can relate.

**Canned responses for volunteers**

*Canned responses for cats*

Unfortunately we cannot take cats from the public because when we do that means one less endangered cat we can take from the shelter.

Finding a home is best if done going through your own network of friends, coworkers, neighborhood, and every resource you can think of to get the word out. Send out an email blast to literally everyone in your address book and then ask them to forward it and share. Beg for help!

Contact rescues! Here is a list of Austin rescues for cats: [http://www.jugglingcats.com/rescue/austin_cat_rescue.htm](http://www.jugglingcats.com/rescue/austin_cat_rescue.htm) and [http://www.streetcatrescue.com/](http://www.streetcatrescue.com/)

The second option is to go through advertising in the public. I am sending you links on how to advertise. It can be done, but will take persistence and strategic ways of advertising (great pictures, persistence, posters, everything you can think of). Most importantly, NEVER advertise for free. Ask for $15 to $20, even if written to a shelter or charity. It will keep the cat hoarders and abusers away.

*Get creative!*

Got a sad or desperate situation? Use it in your title! Make your ad stand out! Cats are hard because there are so many of them so the more creative you are the better chance you give your cat. Example: **THIS KOOL KITTY NEEDS A NEW LITTER BOX!** Or in keeping with desperate situations: **“MY OWNER HAS TO TRAVEL BUT WON’T BUY ME A TICKET! HELP A KITTY OUT!!!”** Inside the ad put cute pics and the behavior info on your cat, including whether or not it has been spayed/neutered and up to date on vaccines.

Take 5 minutes each morning and write a brand new ad and delete the old one. Change your title and the body of your ad around so you won’t be kicked off as spam.

**Canned responses for dogs**

Unfortunately we cannot take dogs from the public because when we do that means one less endangered dog we can take from the shelter.

Finding a home is best if done going through your own network of friends, coworkers, neighborhood, and every resource you can think of to get the word out. Send out an email blast to literally everyone in your address book and then ask them to forward it and share. Beg for help!
You can also contact breed specific rescue. Here is a long list for the Austin Area: [http://austinrescue.com/](http://austinrescue.com/)

The second option is to go through advertising in the public. I am sending you links on how to advertise and giving you information on how to advertise SAFELY and in addition to these links you can also do a Google search for breed specific rescues and email or call them. It can be done, but will take persistence and strategic ways of advertising (great pictures, persistence, posters, everything you can think of).

Most importantly, NEVER advertise for free. If you use Craigslist or Petfinder ask for a $35-$40 re-homing fee, even if written to a shelter or charity. It will keep the people looking for dogs/cats to abuse away (dog fighters look for FREE dogs to use as “bait” dogs and others look for FREE dogs to sell to medical research labs) Also, require a vet reference and let them know you will check it. Call the vet and tell them you are about to re-home your dog with this person and ask if they are a responsible pet owner. Do not feel bad about doing this!! Vets are used to getting these calls and it’s important to keep your dog safe. I word ads like this: “There is a $35 re-homing fee for this dog that can be written to any charity you support and I will mail it there. I also require a vet reference and I will check it.”

Get creative!
Do you have a sad story? A tough situation? Use it in the title of your ad! Now is the time to swallow your pride in the name of your pet! Getting a divorce and neither of you can keep the dog? “DIVORCE DOG SEEKS NEW TIL’ DEATH DUE US PART COUPLE!! “ Think up something new each morning and take 5 minutes to do a new ad and delete your old one to keep it fresh! In the body of your ad tell the good and the bad about your dog and don’t forget to tell whether he/she is spayed/neutered and up to date on vaccines. Change your words around each day in your ad or craigslist will not accept it and kick you off as spam.

Ad sources
Craigslist. To post: [https://post.craigslist.org/aus/C/pet/none/x](https://post.craigslist.org/aus/C/pet/none/x)

A Million Times PLEASE!! SAD 6 Month Lab Mix Headed To Shelter!! (AUSTIN)

Date: 2011-06-18, 1:26PM CDT
Reply to: your anonymous craigslist address will appear here

Please, Please, Please, Please… if I could type it a million times I would. This poor baby showed up at the shelter today clinging to her carrier for dear life. She was drooling all over herself out of stress and fear. It was THE saddest thing to see. The owner’s friend brought her because the owner couldn’t bear to do it. She has NO time for this pup and thought maybe someone would adopt her at the shelter but Town Lake is FULL and they are NOT No kill!! I asked them to please take this terrified gal home and give me 3 days at least, to try and find her a really good home.

Holly is a 6 month old lab/painter mix and when she isn’t petrified and hanging on to someone begging for her life she is actually a romping, playful pup that loves everyone and every other creature on earth! Got Dogs? Holly will love having playmates! Got cats? Holly will love them, too!!

There is a $50 re-homing fee for Holly that will be reimbursed upon proof of spay surgery and we will require a vet reference, which will be checked. I am a rescue person and this dog MUST go to a home where she will be loved, adored, spayed and NOT used for breeding! If that home is yours we would love to hear from you.

These pics show how scared she was about being surrendered to the shelter today!
She came into Town Lake SO loaded down with flias that when they gave her a Capstar they fell off and actually made a pile you could physically sweep up on the floor. Now she is anemic because of it. She also has demodex and a heart murmur. This poor girl has been through hell and still remains sweet and loving through it all! The GOOD news is Austin Pets Alive is offering help with her medical expenses for anyone who can come adopt her by the end of the day today and save her life!!

Town Lake has only given this sweetie until 7pm, to be out of the shelter or she loses her life!!! Can someone please take a chance on her? She is the most darling dog. She loves everyone, gives kisses to anyone who comes near her and she is fine with other dogs, too! She is only 3 yrs. old!! She really wants to live and know what it's like to be loved!

SHE MUST HAVE ADOPTION APP BY 7PM TODAY!!! Town Lake is not looking for a foster. She must be adopted and you have to be able to go meet her in person or they won't let you adopt!! This one is URGENT and time is SHORT. The ID is A598279 and they are open from 11:30 until 7pm tomorrow for adoptions. You can get their info at www.getapetnow.com coe

PLEASE WATCH HER VIDEO!!
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WarCnImRLE

Pawsitively Texas: http://pawsitivelytexas.com/resources-for-pet-owners/pet-transport-directory/


Facebook, Dogs: http://www.facebook.com/PawsTexas?ref=mf

Google.com: “Texas Cat Rescue”

Google this and then go like their page and post with pics “Texas Cat Rescue Facebook” & “Texas Dog Rescue Facebook”

How to advertise or rehome


No Kill or Low Kill Shelters:

http://rocco2.com/pawsshelter/

http://www.austinhumanesociety.org/

PASS protocols

Emails & phone

When answering Pass emails please read the email carefully before deciding whether or not it is appropriate to use a canned response. Most emails will require a little more attention or at least some personalization. Be sure to
address the person by name at the start of the email and end by signing your name. Try and say something positive to the person about whatever their circumstance is. An example might be: “Hi Joe, Thank you for taking in this little dog (cat) and trying to find it a home!” and after that if you need to add the canned response, at least it will appear more personal in nature. If you make people feel good in some way (even if the situation isn’t all that great) there is a better chance they will do the right thing by the animal.

If a person needs to correspond with a Pass Volunteer more than once for the same animal it would be nice to keep the consistency of having the same person interact with them each time. If you sign off with your name the next person coming in to answer emails will be able to tell who to alert that they have an email waiting to be answered. For instance, if you see an email in Pass that I have been corresponding to you can email me and let me know that “Joe” is replying back to me and needs more help so I can go there and answer him.

Be sure and click on the star after you have replied to an email or called a person back so someone else doesn’t come along and think that email or phone call still needs attention.

Please be sure to read the emails carefully. Is the person really asking for behavioral help? Is the person just frustrated with something about the animal and maybe just needs some support? Would some low cost medical maybe keep the animal in the home? Is their cat soiling in the house? If so send them some tips on how to stop that. Have they taken the cat to the vet to make sure it isn’t a medical issue? Do they seem to be concerned that the cat or dog is staying out in the cold? If so, we may not be able to take the animal but besides the canned response we can also give them some tips on what to use for simple cat and dog houses, filled with straw and set up off the ground and away from the wind, that will give the animal some comfort until a better solution can be found. Try to read between the lines, ask questions…see if you can help. A canned response will suffice for some, but most will need a little more attention.

Please fill out the Contact Form for each email and phone call. This is how we get our stats and our stats are how we get grants. No Grants = No Pass Program!

Know your resources

1. Try and keep up with the protocols of the places we use for resources. For instance, Austin Humane Society will not take stray animals. If it’s an owner surrender the person can make an appointment. There is usually always a 2-3 week waiting list and the animal will have to pass a behavioral evaluation. They also require a small donation to surrender an animal.
2. Animal Trustees does not see sick animals. They do wellness days, spay and neuter and deeply discounted HW Treatment. They do have someone for emergency surgeries (also deeply discounted!!) but that vet isn’t always there so people need to call and set an appointment or drop by. Animal Trustees usually will not answer their phone. Tell people to leave a msg. and someone will call them back.
3. Look through the resources we use and if you aren’t sure what to tell people about them check out their websites to learn more about them.
4. Feel free to seek out new resources and information! We are always looking for new ways to help the public! Before using them, though, please send them to me so I can check them out to verify them.

Re-homing someone’s animal with ads and postings

Usually it is best to try and get a person to do their own ads and Facebook postings to re-home their dog or cat but if they aren’t resourceful or computer savvy and you decide to help them some protocols need to be followed.
1. Get good pics. Put the dog or cat on Craigslist brand new every morning. Let the owner know what kind of re-homing fee you will charge. I never charge less than a $40 re-homing fee for a dog and I say it can be donated to that person’s charity of choice. I also require a vet reference. When a vet reference is given the person needs to call that vet, tell them they are about to re-home their animal with this person and ask if they are a responsible pet owner. Let the owner know they will need to get those things from anyone asking to take the dog. Get permission and use the owner’s contact info in the ad or Facebook posting so you can direct inquiries straight to them. I would use an email address rather than a phone number. For cats the fee should be at least $15, using the same directions as above. Also, check your junk folder regularly and remind the pet owner to check theirs. CL ads go there a lot and even if you use the owner’s contact info you both will get responses to your ad.

2. We are looking for adopters and not fosters. If someone offers to foster any dog you put on CL or Facebook they cannot be affiliated with APA in any way. Sometimes our own fosters want to help and offer to foster animals placed on ad sites. We cannot do this because when a foster for APA fosters a Pass dog then APA assumes responsibility for that dog. Even if that foster hasn’t fostered for a year….if they are an approved foster for our APA adoption program we cannot use them as a foster for Pass.

3. Keep in contact with the owner so you will know when you can delete your ads and postings.

4. If you place an animal on Facebook please don’t forget to monitor the postings. I do not charge the re-homing fees on facebook but I would still try and get a vet reference and get it checked. Facebook is where you will have to keep an eye on things. Some people, especially on rescue sites, try to take dogs just to keep them alive. I would be careful and get a really good feel for any site you post on before listing an animal there and then you will still have to go back and keep track of comments and questions. There will be many. If you have any questions about Facebook please don’t hesitate to ask me. I have a lot of experience with the rescue sites there. Just because someone is posting on a rescue site doesn’t mean they are okay or a good candidate for that animal. Some are backyard breeders and others are collectors. If someone is interested in a dog or cat you put on Facebook ask questions. Is the dog going to be kept inside or stuck out in a pen? Are you going to adopt the dog or just take it to save its life and then give it to someone? You cannot be too careful!

5. We never put dogs or cats on craigslist that have not been spayed or neutered, and neither should the public. If you are going to do an ad for someone this is the first thing you need to find out. If they need low cost spay/neuter then they can go to Animal Trustees of Austin or Emancipet before ads are placed. If you are suggesting they do their own ads please let them know it is in the animal’s best interest not to re-home them prior to this being done. Their animal could end up with a back-yard breeder or worse.

Dog and cat returns and people re-homing animals

1. We always take our animals back so if someone adopted their dog or cat from us and needs to return please forward the email to the appropriate department/person if it’s a dog or cat. If they are returning due to behavior issues also cc the dog or cat behavior teams so that they may be able to instruct the person on how to deal and curb whatever behavior they are having problems with.

2. If someone wants to re-home their dog or cat and mentions they adopted or rescued it then always find out where they adopted or rescued from before sending re-homing info. Like us, most rescues want their animals back and not re-homed some other way. Austin Humane Society takes their animals back and so do most others so they always need to check with the organization where they got the animal before re-homing another way.
What to do if you have to miss your shift

1. We have a calendar in our Pass email program. Please go into the calendar on Sunday nights and enter the days and times you will be on duty for the next week. We have to keep consistency in the email and phone system as well as being at AAC. Please only answer emails or take calls on your shift. If you have some extra time and want to help during other times please email the person on duty and ask if they want some help.

2. If you are going to be on vacation, are sick, or have any other reason you cannot do your shift please let the Volunteer Coordinators. If you cannot commit to the emails on a consistent basis we may not be able to keep you as a volunteer. This is an overwhelming program and during certain times of the year we are so busy we simply cannot survive without dependable volunteers. You are SO important!!!