Municipal animal shelters and humane societies frequently report animal adoption stories with happy endings -- an abandoned dog finds a permanent home with a young family or a stray cat is adopted and becomes the perfect companion for a retired couple.

As gratifying as these episodes are, they are only a part of the animal adoption picture. Animal shelters that seek homes for dogs and cats have a difficult task before them. The shelter employee who euthanizes many animals daily is critically aware of the lack of suitable homes for the dogs and cats born into the community.

All too often, shelters concentrate so much on high adoption rates that they release animals to irresponsible homes, only to create more work for themselves when the pets are abandoned later, or produce more animals.

Shelters can improve their adoption rates, however, by following a few sound practices that have been proven in the business world. Although some shelters balk at thinking of

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adoptions this way, these practices can place more animals while maintaining (and possibly improving) the quality of the animals' new homes.

-- Make sure the animals you try to place are in good health and are properly vaccinated. Your shelter should set the example of good animal care to the new pet owners.

Check each adoptable animal for ear mites, fleas and ticks. Make sure their toenails are clipped. If you have volunteers to help you, have them groom the adoptable animals (this is a good project for scouts, 4-H clubs and other groups). Animals that are unaccustomed to people may become better potential pets because of this interaction with volunteers.

Don't be a source of animal disease in the community by releasing unhealthy pets. The extra expense of shots and health check-ups will be recovered by increased adoptions, and will improve the shelter's public relations standing.

-- Don't be afraid to advertise. You are competing with pet shops, breeders and individuals who offer unwanted litters free. Make sure your community knows that healthy, attractive animals are available from your shelter.

-- Be sure that your shelter is open to adopters at hours that are convenient, and that your location is well-marked and easy to find. List your shelter under "Pets" in the telephone book.

-- Pets that are cheap and easily available attract uncaring and irresponsible adopters. Make sure your adoption fees and your requirements for new owners reflect the high quality of the animals you are offering. Include a fee or deposit for neutering.

-- Don't rely on kind-hearted people who adopt animals to keep them from being destroyed. While many people will adopt pets for this reason, the pet and the new owners stand a much better chance of a happy life together when the animal is chosen for its merits, rather than simply to keep it alive.

With a little extra effort, you can place more animals, and place them with responsible, caring families, where they will share a long life of companionship, love and good health.

(For more on adoptions, see the back page.)

SHELTER SENSE is published by The National Humane Education Center, a division of The Humane Society of the United States, 2100 L St., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20037, (202) 452-1100.

Subscription rate:
six issues—$5.00.
5 or more subscriptions to the same address—$4.00 per subscription.

The Humane Society of the United States announces a new two- to three-day program for humane educators from animal control agencies and humane societies. The program is available at The Norma Terris Humane Education Center in East Haddam, CT, operated by the National Association for the Advancement of Humane Education (NAHAE), a division of HSUS.

Participants can utilize the Center's library resources, look through the NAHAE Humane Education Masterfile, preview audio-visual materials and consult with the NAHAE staff on the problems of their local organizations.

There is a $50 consultation fee, and participants are responsible for their own hotel and travel expenses. However, special hotel rates are available if reservations are made through the Center.

For complete information, write Professional Development Program, The Norma Terris Humane Education Center, PO Box 98, East Haddam, CT 06423.