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Humane Society of Fremont County Trains Volunteers to be Canine Counselors  
*Program Teaches Volunteers to be Qualified Dog Handlers*

**Cañon City, CO:** Shelter volunteers are people with big hearts. They give up their free time to help homeless animals enjoy life. People have different experiences and skill levels with dogs, so a training program that teaches volunteers to handle the dogs consistently helps shelter dogs become adoptable. Molly Obert and fellow volunteers from the Fort Collins area created the Canine Counselor program to teach volunteers force free training methods.

Molly Obert, Fort Collins area volunteer:

“My colleagues and I designed this program to help the Humane Society of Fremont County volunteers learn the skills necessary to safely and humanely provide enrichment for the shelter dogs. We also intended to increase the rates of adoption and recidivism by teaching the volunteers how to safely get to know and spend time with the dogs.

“Dogs in kennels 24/7 need stimulation and enrichment to stay healthy. The Canine Counselor program equips volunteers with skills to provide positive human interaction. This builds the dogs’ trust in humans. Getting the dogs safely out of the kennels and on walks when they are ready, enables them to not only get stimulation and exercise, but also to be seen by the community.

“We sought to teach volunteers the basic skill set to read dog body language and communicate positively. Safety is an issue in the shelter setting, so understanding dog body language and behavior is necessary to staying safe. This program is Force-Free, no punishment, Positive Reinforcement Training. When volunteers are handling the dogs in a consistent manner, they learn quickly which behaviors are rewarded, so they offer those behaviors more consistently.

“We are very pleased with the outcome of the Canine Counselor program at the Humane Society of Fremont County. The volunteers worked hard on their assignments and made great progress in their own and their canine projects’ progress.”

Doug Rae, Director of the Humane Society of Fremont County:

“I always support any program that benefits the animals. In this case, the Canine Counselor program does exactly that, while also benefiting our volunteers. This is a wonderful training opportunity for the volunteers and one that also helps shelter dogs on several levels. So for me, it’s a win-win...the Canine Counselor program is a great teaching moment for the volunteers and simply wonderful for the dogs!”

Kathy McGregor, HSFC Volunteer Coordinator:

“The Canine Counselor training program has had a huge impact on the Humane Society of Fremont County volunteer program. By going through the four week, hands-on course the volunteers learned so much about dog behavior, training skills, problem solving, etc.

“Many of the dogs in our shelter come in with absolutely no training or leash skills at all. The Canine Counselor students were able to make huge strides with the dogs by applying the knowledge they gained in the classes. The students graduated with an in depth understanding of dog behavior. These new handling skills enable our shelter dogs to become more adoptable.”

The Canine Counselor program was four weekly two-hour training sessions which covered:

- Learn and assess dog behavior and body language
- Safely evaluate dogs for potential transfer to other shelters/rescues
- Be able to choose and execute the most beneficial protocol based on that assessment
- Charge a clicker and know how to teach basic skills such as sit/down/touch
- Know the difference between reinforcing a behavior (operant conditioning) and conditioning a stimulus (classical conditioning)
- Basic kennel protocols
- How introduce yourself to a dog

In addition to the weekly trainings, volunteers had weekly homework with three assigned dogs to practice their skills.

The program ended on the fifth week with written and skills handling tests. Ten Humane Society of Fremont County volunteers completed the program and earned the distinction of becoming Canine Counselors Level 1.

**About Humane Society of Fremont County:** The Humane Society of Fremont County is an open admission shelter that provides animal services to cities in and unincorporated Fremont County and Westcliffe. This 501(c) (3) corporation is governed by a board of directors.  
<https://www.humanesocietyfremontcounty.org/> *Saving Lives is Our Business*

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