



**Midlands**  
**HUMANE SOCIETY**

## **VOLUNTEER HANDBOOK**

1020 Railroad Ave  
Council Bluffs, IA 51503  
(712) 396-2270

**To schedule a time to volunteer**  
Sign up in advance at  
*[www.midlandshumanesociety.org](http://www.midlandshumanesociety.org)*

## **SHELTER AND CONTACT INFORMATION**

Location: Midlands Humane Society  
1020 Railroad Avenue  
Council Bluffs, IA 51503

Email: [midlandshumanesociety@gmail.com](mailto:midlandshumanesociety@gmail.com)

Website: <http://midlandshumanesociety.org>

Phone: 712-396-2270

### **Shelter/Volunteer Hours**

Monday-Sunday: Three dog walking shifts 8AM/Noon/6PM.

Feel free to stop anytime in between. Dogs need to get out as often as possible.

Monday-Sunday: Two shifts for Cat Care and Cleaning 8AM/4PM.

Cats can be cleaned and socialized at any time if needed. They are always wanting cuddled.

Sunday—CLOSED volunteers still needed

### **Volunteer Coordinator:**

Email: [volunteer@midlandshumanesociety.org](mailto:volunteer@midlandshumanesociety.org)

Phone: 712-328-2263 (volunteer / staff use only)

## **ABOUT THE MIDLANDS HUMANE SOCIETY (MHS)**

### **Mission Statement**

To protect and nurture companion animals and enrich the lives of people who love them

### **Vision Statement**

We visualize a better Community through loving relationships between people and pets.

### **Our Tagline**

“Helping tails find happy endings!”

## **Core Values**

- Compassion
- Exceptional Customer Service
- Advocacy, Education & Support
- Collaboration & Partnership
- Appreciation for Staff, Volunteers & Supporters
- Healthy Work Environment
- Sound Stewardship

## **Our Purpose**

- Rescue
- Shelter
- Rehabilitate
- Adoption
- Spay & Neuter
- Prevent Cruelty
- Promote responsible pet ownership
- Celebrate the human-animal bond
- Engage in community development

## **Our Programs and Services**

As the first humane society in Council Bluffs we will provide a comprehensive animal welfare center offering a safe and comfortable environment for the animals of Council Bluffs and Pottawattamie County. This will include excellent standards of care, proactive adoption services that match pets with adopters, plus a diverse array of volunteer opportunities, community outreach and public education programs at our animal shelter.

## **Our History**

In January 2006, a group of concerned citizens came together to address the growing and unmet animal welfare needs in the Council Bluffs area. Inadequate local animal shelter facilities, city population increases, and lack of public education had resulted in animal over and its associated problems. It was unanimously agreed upon that the City's animal control function alone could not adequately fulfill the needs of these displaced animals.

In partnership with the City of Council Bluffs, Midlands Humane Society (MHS) invested two years of planning organizing and research into this vision. A feasibility study concluded that a humane society was a viable and much needed component of the community. Following that, a business plan was developed and MHS (a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization) was formed and the capital campaign ensued.

To date, MHS has raised over 95% of our \$3.2 million goal. In addition to contributing \$1.5 million toward the capital campaign, the City of Council Bluffs has provided a seven-acre parcel of land at the junction of College Road and Railroad Avenue for the facility and an adjacent dog park.

In late 2013, earthwork began on the property to develop t for construction and the facility is scheduled for completion in January 2015. Shortly thereafter, MHS will begin operations as the first humane society in the Council Bluffs area.

In March 2017, Pottawattamie Animal Shelter became part of the Midlands Humane Society.

## **VOLUNTEER—CLASSIFICATION**

MHS Volunteers are classified as “volunteer at will.” Either you or the MHS may choose to terminate the volunteer relationship at any time, with or without cause, and with or without notice.

The services that you provide at MHS are strictly voluntary. Volunteers do not receive any wages or compensation for these services, nor are made any promises of employment. MHS volunteers are not covered by any Workers Compensation.

Your direct supervisor is the Midlands Humane Society Volunteer Coordinator. Any concerns about your volunteer classification should be addressed to the Volunteer Coordinator.

## **PARENTAL CONSENT**

Anyone over the age of 18 can apply to volunteer at Midlands Humane Society. Anyone between the ages of 12 thru 15 can volunteer with an adult. Ages 16 thru 17 must have signed consent form by parent or guardian.

## **VOLUNTEER INFORMATION**

It is important that MHS volunteer records be accurate always to ensure that you receive information about safety issues, shift changes, and other important developments.

Promptly notify the Volunteer Coordinator if there are any changes to your name, home address, telephone number, email address or any other information pertinent to your volunteer service.

## **ORIENTATION / TRAINING**

All volunteers are required to attend Orientation and Training for their specific responsibilities. Volunteers may express interest in additional responsibilities to the Volunteer Coordinator (preferred duties can be indicated on your volunteer application). For both human and animal safety, volunteers may only perform duties for which they have been trained. Acting beyond or outside of documented training is prohibited.

## **SAFETY & ACCIDENT PREVENTION**

Safety is our priority at MHS. Midlands strives to provide a clean, hazard-free, and safe environment in accordance and compliance with the Occupational Safety and Health Act.

As a volunteer, you are expected to take part in maintaining this environment. Many accidents are prevented by remaining vigilant and careful, including:

- Working within the boundaries of the training you received.
- Observing all posted safety rules, adhering to all safety instructions provided by your supervisor, and using safety equipment as required.
- Learning the location of safety and emergency equipment, as well as safety and/or emergency phone numbers.
- Reporting any malfunctions or problems with safety equipment to your supervisor immediately.

Accidents and injuries do happen. In the event of the event of a “near miss” injury or accident, report immediately to the Volunteer Coordinator. Such reports are necessary to comply with laws, ensure the safety, and to help us place adoptable animals in appropriate homes.

Volunteers are NOT covered by Worker’s Compensation Insurance—any medical expenses are at the sole expense of the volunteer and/or volunteer’s personal insurance. Please check with your physician prior to volunteering. If you think you may be pregnant or are pregnant and nursing as there may be health risks working with or around animals.

## **PRACTICING SAFETY AROUND ANIMALS**

The shelter environment can be stressful to animals; therefore, behaviors cannot always be predicted. Remember these animals are NOT our pets, may not react the way our pets do to “normal” actions, and therefore extra caution and care is mandatory.

- Handling of animals is strictly prohibited until you have attended training.
- Your role is to create a calm, controlled atmosphere for social interaction and /or exercise. Play is to be kept controlled always; overexciting an animal may result in aggression and/or negatively affect its adoptability.
- If you discover an animal out of its kennel, DO NOT reach out to grab it. Close any doors in the immediate area and alert a staff member, who will safely retrieve an animal.
- If involved in animal socialization, remember that all animals must be kept separate always, i.e. no touching or interaction. Prohibiting contact between animals reduces the spread of disease AND the possibility of animal aggression, especially under times of stress.
- If you witness a fight, DO NOT attempt to break it up. Fights often sound worse than they are, however, only trained staff members are authorized to intervene.
- Bringing your own pet to the shelter while volunteering is prohibited.

Remember, accidents do happen. You are required to report any bite, scratch or other injury to MHS staff immediately, no matter how small or insignificant it may seem. Medical history is often uncertain in many animals.

## **SCHEDULING**

Many volunteer positions are flexible in scheduling, while other positions require commitment to a regular weekly or monthly schedule. Prior to making a commitment to the MHS volunteer program, please discuss your availability with the Volunteer Coordinator.

As a volunteer, we understand that life priorities (work, family, etc.) sometimes inhibit volunteer service as scheduled. Please communicate any absence at least 1-2 days in advance to the Volunteer Coordinator by telephone to honor staff and volunteer time and effort.

If your schedule changes we will try our best to accommodate your new availability, but please be aware that certain volunteer positions fill quickly and space may not exist. Because our animals depend on you for their care and well-being, excessive absences may be cause for termination.

If you are unable to volunteer for a period of 6 months four hours or longer, refresher training may be required before resuming your volunteer activities. Prior to your return, contact the Volunteer Coordinator.

## **RECORDING SERVICE HOURS**

Sign in at IPad. *This helps us know who is in the building in case of emergency.* Do not sign in for another volunteer. For off-site volunteer activities, the Volunteer Coordinator will work with you to track your hours.

Accurate logs of volunteer service hours and tasks allows MHS to plan for the future, to recognize volunteers for their service, to comply with state and federal tax laws, and to apply for grants from national organizations.

## **COMMUNICATION**

Volunteer notices, updates, and other important information about the volunteer program will be distributed by e-mail. *You are responsible to check these communications and keep up-to-date on current happenings, safety issues and procedures regarding your volunteer service.*

Please communicate with the Volunteer Coordinator regarding any questions, issues, concerns or comments. If you have an urgent need or concern, contact the Shelter Manager.

## **APPROPRIATE ATTIRE**

All MHS volunteers are expected to dress appropriately for the job they perform, bearing in mind the safety and professional needs of the job.

Specific Attire Guidelines:

- Proper Footwear – Enclosed-toe shoes with nonslip soles are required for safety reasons (floors are often slippery) and to minimize contact with chemicals and animal waste.
- Clothing – As a shelter representative, casual clothing is encouraged along with a neat, tidy appearance. Long pants (jeans preferred) and t-shirt or long sleeve short are required for working with animals. Our primary concerns are preventing contact with chemicals and animal scratches/bites. All volunteers are prohibited from wearing tank tops, crop tops, or sleeveless shirts. *\*In addition, clothing must be laundered between visits to the shelter to reduce the spread of disease and viruses.*

- Jewelry – Limit jewelry to avoid snagging or animal ingestion (if lost), especially long and/or dangling jewelry worn from neck, arm, wrist, ears or nose

Volunteers wearing items which are deemed inappropriate may be asked to leave the property. If you have further questions about your expected attire, please discuss these questions with the Volunteer Coordinator.

## **PERSONAL ITEMS**

MHS is not responsible for lost, stolen, or damaged belongings. Please leave all valuables at home; no valuables should be left in your vehicle. A limited number of lockers are available for staff and volunteer use – if you must bring a personal item, please discuss the availability of lockers with the Volunteer Coordinator prior to your shift. The refrigerator may be used for snacks/beverages; please take these items home with you at the end of your volunteer shift.

*MHS asks volunteers to refrain from using cell phones, cameras, or recording devices during their volunteer shift (see Personal Phone Calls and Social Media).*

## **VOLUNTEERS ON PREMISES/UNAUTHORIZED AREAS**

Out of respect to our customers, we ask volunteers to leave open the parking spaces closest to the building (allowances are made for volunteers with a disability). For your safety and MHS liability, volunteers are only allowed on-site when scheduled and with staff supervision.

Volunteers are not to be in any unauthorized or unapproved area without staff approval. Unauthorized areas include; isolation areas and veterinary areas.

## **VISITORS**

Visitors (family, friends, and children) are prohibited during your volunteer shift and at all times in staff/volunteer areas. Many volunteers enjoy sharing their volunteer activities with friends and family. If you would like to volunteer with another person, please contact the Volunteer Coordinator to arrange for volunteer training for all people involved.

## **PERSONAL PHONE CALLS**

*MHS asks volunteers to refrain from using cell phones during their volunteer shift.*

Personal phone calls disrupt our focus of caring for animals and providing exceptional customer service. If you need to answer or place a call during your shift, please return any animal you are working with before doing so as handling animals while distracted is dangerous for both you and the animal.

MHS phones and computers are for business purpose only and not to be used for personal activities including email and social networking.

## **SOCIAL MEDIA**

MHS is careful to maintain its media presence and reputation. All media messages (social or traditional) regarding MHS may only come from designated staff. Requests for interviews, pictures, or other media must be referred to your supervisor.

We understand that volunteers often wish to share their experiences with family and friends, however *all social media messages regarding shelter operations are strictly prohibited unless approved by the Volunteer Coordinator.*

Pictures are not allowed.

## **BREAKS**

Volunteers are encouraged to take breaks as needed during their shift. Notify the Volunteer Coordinator or direct supervisor before taking a break. Volunteers are encouraged to utilize designated break areas. *Please avoid "hanging out" in the Front Desk and Lobby areas.*

## **SMOKING**

Our goal is to provide a healthy and pleasant work environment for all employees and volunteers. MHS prohibits any form of tobacco and/or e-cigarette use in the building or grounds. Smoking is strictly prohibited while handling animals

## **PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT**

As a volunteer, you are a representative of MHS. *You may be the only “picture” a passer-by, potential adopter, donor, volunteer, or staff member sees of MHS.* While volunteering and/or when wearing your volunteer attire, you are expected to present a positive and professional image at all time to staff, customers, and other volunteers.

MHS programs and services to animals and public improve by working together. In addition, policy and procedure decisions concerning shelter operations and animal care are ultimately the responsibility of staff and administration and must be respected and followed by all volunteers.

Please leave pet counseling and advice to our experienced staff. The staff has access to each pet’s behavior and medical profile. *While we know, you have the best of intentions, personal opinions may not serve in the best interest of an adopter or pet.*

In addition, please be mindful of the privacy of our customers. Refrain from joining in on customer/staff conversations, which may be of a sensitive nature.

## **DISEASE TRANSMISSION & CONTROL**

The most dangerous threat to an animal in a shelter environment is disease. A major part of our job as staff and volunteers is to reduce the chance that an animal will become ill during its stay at MHS.

- A healthy animal may be carrying a virus while exhibiting no symptoms.
- A disease which may generally exhibit itself mildly in an owned pet in a home can be deadly to shelter animals whose immune systems have been weakened by stress.

## **STRESS REDUCTION**

Stress is a primary factor affecting an animal’s immune system. One of our most important jobs is to keep our animals’ stress levels as low as possible. Speak softly, move slowly, project a calm presence.

## **HYGIENE**

### *Hand Washing*

Frequent hand washing while volunteering is mandatory. Washing hands helps eliminate the risk of becoming ill yourself, and helps prevent the spread of disease throughout the shelter. Alternatively, you may wear latex gloves provided by the shelter during your volunteer shift. Wall dispensers of disinfectant gel can be found throughout the shelter. *Disinfectant gel does*

*NOT kill parvo virus, which is highly contagious to animals. Hand washing is our/your best defense.*

### *Clothing*

Please use aprons when working with puppies or kittens to reduce the risk of disease spread. After volunteering, change your clothes and shoes before interacting with your home pets. Wash clothing between volunteer shifts to avoid disease spread.

### *Personal Pets*

Disease spread to your personal pets at home is highly unlikely if your pets are fully vaccinated and you take the above simple precautions. If you have concerns regarding affecting your personal pet's health, please see the Volunteer Coordinator.

## **EUTHANASIA**

MHS is the only open-admission serving the City of Council Bluffs and Pottawattamie County. This means we generally accept every stray dog, cat, and small animal that is brought to us. *We make every effort to place adoptable animals into loving and permanent homes.* If a successful adoption does not occur within a short amount of time, we utilize off-site adoption, foster homes, and an ever-growing network of Rescue Organizations and Shelters to increase an animal's chance for adoption.

The humane euthanasia of abandoned and surrendered pets is the devastating result of a community wide problem. *The most difficult task that our staff performs is euthanasia.* If an animal that is admitted to MHS possesses serious medical or behavioral issues that make it unfair to the animal and/or potential adopters to place for adoption, we humanely euthanize the animal.

We do NOT place a "time-limit" on the animals in our care, yet *due to lack of homes* we do have to occasionally euthanize for space reasons. At these times, we first select the sick, injured and aggressive animals for euthanasia.

We believe that in some cases the most humane action that can be taken for a particular animal is to end its suffering through humane euthanasia. Due to the community-wide problem of pet overpopulation, these decisions are part of MHS responsibility.

***\*\*Individuals who cannot support humane euthanasia should not join our volunteer team.***

Volunteers with questions or concerns regarding the disposition of any animal at MHS should speak with the Volunteer Coordinator or Shelter Manager.

*\*\*These decisions are extremely stressful for our staff. Under no circumstances may any volunteer disparage a staff member over euthanasia decisions. Doing so is cause for immediate dismissal from the volunteer program.*

Under no circumstances should a volunteer discuss instances of euthanasia with family, friends, or acquaintances. Under no circumstances should a volunteer discuss instances of euthanasia with the media or via social media.

## **USE OF COMPANY PROPERTY**

The MHS will provide you with the necessary equipment/supplies for your tasks. This equipment is not for personal use and is to remain on MHS property. Volunteer use of company phones, computers, printers and electronic equipment is prohibited unless approved by the Volunteer Coordinator.

The MHS premises, telephones, and computers are not to be used for volunteers or others to engage in the practice of soliciting collections or donations; selling raffles, goods, or services; operating betting pools; or solicitations of any kind.

Computers may only be used for tasks assigned by the Volunteer Coordinator.

## **CONFIDENTIALITY**

As a condition of volunteer service, all volunteers are expected to maintain confidentiality of all proprietary or privileged information to which they are exposed while serving as a volunteer. This information includes MHS personnel information, client or customer information, suppliers, procedures, cost of merchandise/services, sales data, price lists, financial information, records, business plans, prospect names, business opportunities, confidential reports, customer lists and contracts, as well as any other overall business of the MHS. Violations of the confidentiality section of the Volunteer Handbook is considered a serious matter and may result in disciplinary action or termination.

Responses to requests for information from outsiders (such as the press or social media) about an animal, an employee, the MHS or any other shelter-related activities are to be given only by authorized personnel. All such inquiries must be directed to your supervisor.

If you are ever unsure of your obligations under this policy, consult with the Volunteer Coordinator and/or Executive Director for clarification.

## **SUBSTANCE ABUSE POLICY**

No volunteer/employee is allowed to consume, possess, sell, or purchase any alcoholic beverage on any property owned by the MHS, or in any vehicle owned or leased by MHS. No volunteer/employee may use, possess, sell, transfer or purchase any drug or other controlled substance that may alter an individual's mental or physical capacity while working for the MHS.

Volunteers may use medication prescribed by a physician if it does not impair ability to perform essential functions of the job effectively and in a safe manner.

The MHS does not tolerate volunteers that are impaired by or under the influence of alcohol or drugs while working.

## **HARASSMENT POLICY**

MHS strives to provide a safe and enjoyable experience for all volunteers, staff and visitors. Harassment is defined (from the viewpoint of the victim) as: the act of systematic and/or continued unwanted and annoying actions of one party or a group, including threats and demands. Harassment includes sexual, physical or verbal comments or actions. Please inform the Volunteer Coordinator and/or Shelter Manager if you witness or experience any form of harassment while serving at MHS. *Harassment of any form is not tolerated and will result in immediate dismissal of volunteer/staff and/or immediate removal of the visitor.*

## **GRIEVANCE PROCEDURE**

We value and welcome your feedback and we want your volunteer experience to be fun, fulfilling and rewarding. If you have a concern or complaint, please notify the Volunteer Coordinator. The Volunteer Coordinator will respond to your concern as soon as possible. Please understand that it may take time to research the concern and discuss the issue with all parties involved. If you do not receive a verbal or written response to your concern, please bring your concern to the attention of the Director.

MHS takes the concerns of our volunteers seriously, no matter how "small." Please also understand that while we are always open to implementing positive changes, there are some suggestions we may not be able to integrate into our policies and procedures. In these situations, the Volunteer Coordinator will discuss the reasons that a change may not be appropriate (or possible) and work with you to help you understand the reasons behind the decision.

## **DISCIPLINARY ACTION**

MHS works diligently to provide a safe and enjoyable experience for all our volunteers. The policies and procedures in place serve as guidelines for appropriate behavior. MHS Volunteers are classified as “volunteer at will”. MHS may choose to terminate the volunteer relationship at any time, with or without cause, and with or without notice.

*Volunteering at MHS is a privilege, not a right.* Volunteers who commit minor violations of policies and procedures will be verbally counseled in an effort to achieve acceptable corrective behavior leading to compliance. Continued violations could result in additional counseling or dismissal. Serious violations will result in termination.

MHS has a zero-tolerance policy for:

- Abusive behavior towards animals
- Physical or verbal abuse of any staff or volunteer
- 1) Disregard for rules and regulations.

In the event of performance problems or behavior concerns, the MHS may take disciplinary action in the form of any or all the 4 steps depending on the severity of the problem and/or number of occurrences:

- 2) Verbal Warning
- 3) Written Warning
- 4) Suspension
- 5) Termination

All volunteer verbal and written warnings are documented.

## **TERMINATION POLICY**

Volunteers may choose or be asked to discontinue their volunteer service to MHS. The procedures for termination are as follows:

- **Voluntary:** If a volunteer wishes to end their service, we ask that the individual make known his/her intentions to the Volunteer Coordinator. If possible, we ask that our volunteers let us know in advance (2 weeks’ notice) that they plan to leave, so that the necessary arrangements can be made to fill the position they are leaving.
- **Involuntary:** Volunteers who do not adhere to the rules and regulations of MHS are subject to dismissal. For more information, see “Disciplinary Action,” above.

## **VOLUNTEER ACKNOWLEDGEMENT STATEMENT**

My signature signifies that I have received a copy of the Volunteer Handbook of the Midlands Humane Society (MHS). I understand that the handbook provides general guidelines of the MHS volunteer practices and policies, and by evidence of my signature, I hereby certify that I have read and understand its contents. I recognize my responsibility to read and review this handbook regularly and seek clarification from my supervisor, if needed. I further understand and agree that this handbook is not binding as a contract and my volunteer service is “at will”, which means either the Society or I may end the volunteer relationship with or without cause or notice. The Society reserves the right to change, add, delete or modify any provisions in this handbook.

Dated: \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_

Volunteer Signature:

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Parent/Guardian Signature (if under 16):

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Management Signature & Title: Date:

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## **VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITY JOB DESCRIPTIONS**

**Adoption Counseling:** Assist potential pet adopters by explaining the adoption process. Talk to people about the animals – their personalities, their history, and what to expect. Help with adoption application and paperwork.

**Animal Care:** Clean kennels and other animal areas to ensure that animals have a safe, clean, and comfortable environment.

**Bathing and Grooming:** Clean, clip animals to improve their appearance and standard of life.

**Building Maintenance:** Assist facilities staff with a broad range of special projects to help maintain, expand, improve, and beautify the shelter. You should have talents in one or more of the following areas: general construction skills, woodworking, painting, fencing, landscaping, flooring, welding, cement and block-work, electrical and plumbing.

**Cat & Kitten Socialization:** Spend one-on-one time with shelter cats. Basic duties include taking approved cats to a play room, observation, hands-on socialization and grooming.

**Clerical:** Assist with mass mailing projects, data entry, and other support as needed.

**Dog & Puppy Socialization:** Play and socialize with shelter dogs and help teach them better social skills with the goal of making dogs more adoptable.

**Special Events:** Help promote MHS adoptable animals at our special events to raise awareness of the shelter and animals. Represent MHS in a positive and informative manner.

**Walking Dogs:** Ensure that dogs get human interaction, fresh air, potty breaks and exercise daily.