

Our community and our animal shelter

Guilford County, located in the Piedmont area of central North Carolina, is the third-largest county in the state, and is home to the densely-populated city of Greensboro (third largest city in the state) as well as the nearby city of High Point. As reported in a local journal (<https://www.businessinsider.com/cities-poverty-soaring-2014-8>) the Greensboro-High Point metropolitan area was identified by the Brookings Institution as one of the ten cities in the United States where poverty is expanding the most rapidly. Additionally, due in part to its original settling in the 18th and 19th centuries by numerous members of the Society of Friends (Quakers), Guilford County has long had a history of welcoming immigrants and refugees. The Doris Henderson Newcomers School, located in Guilford County, serves newly-arrived immigrants and refugees from numerous countries around the world who have no knowledge of English. This school is one of a few of its kind in the entire country, and is the only one of its kind in North Carolina.

This combination of relatively high rates of poverty and a relatively high proportion of citizens who are not fluent in English contribute to the growing need in our county for diverse means of community outreach and education regarding animal welfare ordinances, animal care norms, and local resources to assist with animal care.

The Guilford County Animal Shelter, our county's only open-admission animal shelter, is one of the largest in the state and in the eastern US. The shelter takes in between 9,000 and 14,000 dogs and cats each year, of which an unacceptably high number have been neglected or abused. In particular, we have a high intake of pit bull mixes and feral/community/unowned cats. Many of these animals are litters of puppies and kittens, and the majority of adult animals we take in are not yet spayed or neutered, attesting to the region's pet overpopulation crisis.

The county government recently (2015) assumed management of the shelter (from the now-defunct nonprofit that had previously held the contract to run the shelter.) Since then the county has taken numerous key steps to improve animal welfare and sheltering, including creating a new county government department of Animal Services, creating a long-overdue literal and organizational "partnership" between the animal shelter and animal control, which are both now under the leadership of a single director of Animal Services, Mr. Jorge Ortega. The county has also formed a citizen Animal Services Advisory Board (advisory to the board of county commissioners) which meets monthly to provide citizen guidance to the Department of Animal Services. Incentives for pet spay/neuter have recently been codified in the county animal ordinance. Finally, and importantly, the county has committed to new partnerships with the numerous local rescue groups not only to increase the live release rate from the shelter, but also to educate citizens in the community about issues including responsible pet ownership and care of community cats, and to direct citizens to financial and other material resources in the community.

One of the chief rescue groups we partner with is Juliet's House Animal Rescue, incorporated as a 501c3 in 2015 and with donations totaling close to \$200,000 in 2017 (additional legal/financial information on Juliet's House available upon request.) Juliet's House is fully volunteer-run, and focuses on three main areas of animal welfare: adopting out rescued homeless animals (including many pulled from the Guilford County shelter) that are fostered in their network of volunteer homes (over 1000 animal were adopted from Juliet's House Animal Rescue in 2017); assisting with spay/neuter assistance (including TNR) in the community; and educating individuals and families, so far primarily through the county school system, with the Guilford County Pet Responsibility Program (GCPRP). **It is in this latter area of focus--the Pet Responsibility Program--that we, Guilford County Animal Services, would like to develop an innovative**

partnership with Juliet's House in order to bring this award-winning pet responsibility program information to a much wider audience—English and non-English speakers--in our county, through active Animal Control officer engagement with pet owners and through online accessibility/interactivity.

Our critical need

We are requesting \$5000 from Maddie's Fund to enable us to hire a website consultant, and two translators, so that we—Guilford County Animal Services--can professionally update the GCPRP website, link it to our county animal services and human services resource pages, and make available to county citizens in interactive digital form, and in Spanish and Arabic as well (the two most common non-English languages in the county), a resource and education guide ("Best Friends" Activity Book) that is already widely used in print form in local schools by the GCPRP. (A .pdf or hard copy of "Best Friends" Activity Book is available upon request.) In addition, our Animal Control officers will distribute hard copies of the Activity Book, as well as direct pet owners to the online resources, when they are engaging with members of the public over the most common animal welfare violation issues (e.g., rabies, dogs running at large, spay/neuter, etc.)

More specifics on the GCPRP and the Best Friends Activity Book

The GCPRP itself consists of a series of six lessons about humane animal care which are presented to classes of 4th grade students by program volunteers, and are aligned with participating schools' Character Education programs and the NC Standard Course of Study. Students learn about the basic needs of animals (nutritious food, fresh water, warm and dry shelter, exercise, and regular veterinary care), safety around dogs and cats, pet overpopulation, the importance of spaying or neutering pets, and the costs associated with caring for a pet. Volunteers also talk with students

about empathy, patience, and the importance of standing up for others. Since 2013, the GCPRP has taught over 2700 4th grade students in twelve Guilford County elementary schools utilizing our Animal Control Officers as speakers and educators. A version of this program is now being pilot-tested currently in county high schools.

Each student participating in the program is given a copy of the GCPRP's "Best Friends" Activity Book. This full color, illustrated 28-page booklet weaves all of the critical above topics together in an engaging, non-judgmental story about the adventures of a young girl and her pets. The book is meant to be both engrossing to the students, and simultaneously to serve as a "one-stop" practical resource for the students' families regarding information about county ordinances, local low-cost spay/neuter clinics, Guilford County Animal Services and local animal rescues. In immigrant families in particular, though to a certain extent in all families, research has shown that children around the age of 10 years often communicate critical information learned in school to their parents and other family members.

Based on the success of the GCPRP in the school, the Guilford County Animal Services Department has recently started utilizing the "Best Friends" Activity Book in the field as a means of education and non-judgmental, positive-message-based community outreach to share information about all the key welfare topics--rabies vaccination and prevention, spay/neuter, feral/community cats, and local animal welfare laws-- in an easy-to-understand and even fun format (the booklet includes puzzles and games.) As the Animal Services Department increasingly moves towards a model of proactive community outreach and engagement rather than one of reactive control, the importance of taking advantage of, and expanding upon, successful community resources—like the Pet Responsibility Program and its "Best Friend" Activity Book – become apparent. A professional website for the GCPRP with an interactive, online version of the

Best Friends booklet that is linked to relevant county websites (both human and animal services sites), as well as versions of the book in Spanish and Arabic, will provide a firm foundation for Guilford County Animal Services to move forward in community outreach and expand the work already being done by our dedicated nonprofit partner, Juliet's House, in schools.

Quantifying “success” of our planned community outreach improvement

We can define key outcomes at least 2 different levels. At the most basic level, it will be relatively straightforward to track and count how many individuals access a weblink related to the Pet Responsibility Program, or even read a hard-copy book given out by Animal Control (we can put vouchers in the book for free rabies vaccines, etc, and each time such a voucher is redeemed we can know the book was at least looked through.) We will also count calls that come into Animal Services asking about pet food resources or pet retention assistance resources that were mentioned in the book, and will also conduct several informal “focus groups” with citizens who have seen the Activity Book, in order to get feedback on the material in the book. The most important outcomes, of course, are quantified by number of animals coming into intake, number of citations written by Animal Control officers for animal violations, number of spay/neuter assistance requests that are followed through, number of litters of feral kittens brought in, and the like. We monitor such key outcomes on an ongoing basis, of course. While we expect our community outreach to improve such measures, we also acknowledge that the effects of increased community outreach/education on such quantities are rarely immediate.

Conclusion

A \$5000 grant from Maddie's Fund would enable Guilford County Animal Services, through innovative partnership with the nonprofit Juliet's House Animal Rescue, to upgrade the

dissemination of the GCPRP's "Best Friends" Activity Book in our diverse and growing county. While the goal of the GCPRP itself is to reach an additional 1200 students at fourteen Guilford County Schools in 2018 with print copies of the booklet, Animal Services' goal is to reach all interested pet owners, including those for whom English is not their first language, with the educational material in the GCPRP as soon as possible. With increased community outreach and education spearheaded by our animal control officers, we can work positively, rather than punitively, to change the culture and norms around pet spay/neuter and animal welfare in our county. We can reduce shelter intake, increase spay/neuter uptake, educate about TNR programs, decrease euthanasia of healthy animals, and provide support for pet retention. All funds received as a result of this application will go directly towards our goal of making the "Best Friends" booklet accessible to a large proportion of Guilford County citizens.

To our knowledge, the GCPRP is the only humane education program of its kind in Guilford County, and Guilford County Animal Services is proud to partner with them through Juliet's House Animal Rescue.