

From: Diego Hernandez [REDACTED]
Sent: Friday, April 28, 2023 12:35 PM
To: Animal - Advisory Board <AdvisoryBoard@washoecounty.gov>; schieveh@reno.gov
Subject: Re: Letter from a concerned former employee

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Forwarding in an effort to make sure my voice is also heard.

On Mon, Apr 17, 2023, 12:35 PM Diego Hernandez [REDACTED] > wrote:
To anyone connected with NHS who wants what's best for the animals,

I'll begin by saying I worked at NHS from 2020 until Fall of 2022. During my time there I was an adoption counselor, the animal admissions desk, dog staff, and trained to be the animal intake staff and the dog evaluator. None of this training came from a manager, supervisor, or anyone in a position above the position I was being trained for.

When I left NHS in the Fall of 2022, it was over a handful of concerns. I was starting to feel like everyone in a position of management was only there to collect a check. The animal care team was constantly being set up for failure with no plans being made to help them or the animals that they're trying to care for. Now that I have been able to see how other shelters are run, it's apparent that NHS is expecting their work force to work solely "out of passion" for the animals. Which seems to be the company's way of saying that they will be leaving everyone underpaid and understaffed with no on-site training, and to just deal with it. Something has to change.

From what I have seen and heard, the management is still just as disconnected. Which is leaving a work force, who knows little to nothing about animals, all alone to try and care for the animals. I can say firsthand that from early 2021 until late 2022, that lack of structure or any real "on the job" training has been a complete detriment to the staff at NHS. During my time there, I was given no real training, no help on how to handle animals, and no assistance with the growing daily task list. NHS was my first step into working with animals, and they gave me zero resources or tools on how to further my education with animals. In my 2 years working at NHS, I never once saw them offer ANY help or education to the animal care team. I've been working at another shelter for around 7 months now and they have already taken the time to train me on proper shelter animal handling and have even gone as far as to get me certified in shelter animal behaviorism. How can NHS justify getting away with not even doing the bare minimum for its employees? Allowing people who do not understand animals to handle them is only going to traumatize the animal or result in the animal biting a human, and isn't that what we all want to avoid?

To continue speaking about the lack of training, I would also like to bring attention to the dog staff supervisor / manager, Amber. The negativity that spreads from Amber is absolutely atrocious. She consistently made me feel targeted, and exaggerated it by playing favorites (something that she still does to current staff). She was rude, impatient, and talked down to/poorly about her staff. All while making it very clear that she doesn't trust them. You would think that as the dog staff manager, Amber would be training all of her staff up to a point that she could at least TRUST them. That was never the case, though, as I have also never seen Amber help her team enough to be willing to train them. There were days back to back that I

was going to Amber directly asking for help, because we did not have enough people to do all of the routine morning tasks. She never once took the initiative to help me, the dogs, or the rest of the team she supposedly runs.

Her extreme negativity was not isolated to just people, though. The way she spoke about the animals while I was there made me feel like she either did not care at all or like she was totally burnt out and not a good fit for her position. Either way, she's continued to be the head of dog staff. This has been of the up-most concern to me, considering she's a big reason I left NHS. There was more than a handful of times that I came to Amber with a concern and I felt totally dismissed. This wouldn't be scary, if my concerns didn't involve a member of the public trying to adopt a dog that was clearly too much for them to handle. In fact, every time I brought up a concern over a mismatched adoption I was blatantly ignored by Amber. She didn't seem to care about the 90 pound dog with all sorts of behavioral issues that was NEVER worked with, and worse yet she didn't seem to care about the 90 year old man who can hardly walk that's trying to take home said dog. Amber seems to echo the thoughts of the board members, which is to just get the animals out. Without worrying about them staying out and certainly not doing very much for them while they are under NHS' care. This, to me, feels like it's going to resort in the same issues that the lack of staffing and training has. More bites, increased length of stay, animals who are suffering, and PEOPLE who are suffering.

Now, I would like to bring the attention to the dogs themselves. With the severe lack of training at NHS, the distrust and lack of care from Amber, and being a grossly underpaid position, the dog staff isn't being given any of the tools necessary to help the animals. Dogs are sitting in their kennels every hour of the day, except for the ~10 minutes they get to spend alone in a yard. Amber does not care enough to be building any sort of enrichment routines for the dogs. So day in and day out, the dogs are staring at a concrete wall with nothing to do. Just waiting for those ten precious minutes they get outside. This is neglect, to put it frankly. Dogs are social animals just like humans, and they need interactions and mental stimulus in order to stay healthy. In my entire time at NHS, I only saw Amber directing a play group between two dogs, twice. And she did not allow anyone else to be a part of it, besides her selected favorite member of staff, because we had "other things to do". There are enough daily volunteers at NHS that it should be no problem to start a more robust enrichment program. The main road block seems to be Amber or any other employee at NHS in a position of leadership not wanting to put in the effort. But the dogs need more than just 10 minutes alone in a yard. More than a 5 minute walk by someone who isn't even handling them properly. The dogs there are in desperate need of more care, and it seems to me that not a single person from management to board member even remotely cares. The entire system at NHS needs to be reworked before the animals silently suffer any longer.