

Good Afternoon,

I am a staff member at the Nevada Humane Society. I have attached a letter expressing my concerns about our management and the state of our shelter. I would like to express that staff is being kept out of the loop of this situation and I only found out because of my relationship with volunteers. I ask that the board do everything in their power to make staff aware, as I believe their opinions would be valuable to the community and for the betterment of our shelter. I cannot do so for fear of termination. If you have any questions or concerns please feel free to contact me through email. Thank you for your consideration and I hope this finds you well.

The State of NHS

I am an employee in the intake department at NHS. Originally, I had written this paper to be shared with management because I had no intention of starting a public incident. Considering recent events, I am sharing this with you instead. I hope that this paper helps to shed some light on the inner workings of NHS. I would like to express to the board that the staff currently at NHS are completely unaware of what is happening. I have tried to tell as many people as I can about the situation but would like to ask for your help in making them aware and heard. Most everyone I've talked to is scared to have their voices heard due to management's track record of firing those who disagree with them. Most staff are in sensitive financial situations and would have to put everything on the line to speak up. Some of our staff are struggling to pay their rent and on the verge of eviction. Those with children are struggling to feed them. These staff members selflessly work for the animals at the expense of making more money somewhere else. They do not deserve to work in a place where upper management has struck fear into their hearts to the point that they can't voice their opinions. You'll notice that the majority of the letters coming in are written anonymously. If NHS knew that staff would come to their back, they would have asked us to. NHS is fully aware that there is a lack of faith and trust in their leadership, and I believe they are hiding this situation intentionally. NHS has been concerningly silent during this whole thing and the only action I'm aware of was banning individuals from the shelter. Why was our first reaction to kick people out? We cannot afford to destroy our volunteer program at the drop of a hat because someone made us angry. Clearly, we lack the maturity to address community concerns in a healthy and productive way.

I have a background working at the SPCA in the admissions department. There, I conducted behavior evaluations, made restrictions for animals, and helped with the transition from shelter to home. During my time there, I was trained in every single department (excluding clinic) and was very intrigued in how the shelter ran from top to bottom. I have been an adoption counselor, an intake coordinator, an evaluator, and cat and dog caretaker. It is not an exaggeration to say that I can fulfill any role in a shelter. While at the SPCA, I visited around 10-15 shelters and have seen a large variety of ways to run a shelter. I am certified in Animal Shelter Behavioral Management through the University of Pacific. I have around 20 Continuing Education Credits specifically pertaining to shelter behavior and management – from feline communication to disease control. I have trapped animals in overcrowded situations. I have also studied Psychology at the University level where I was on the dean list and am a member of Psi Chi Honors Society. Whether it is within my philosophies or not; I am intrigued to read the different opinions on how to train dogs. I believe that if two people disagree about something, there is often a truth within both their arguments. Above all, I believe that a shelter should be the light of our community. A testament of humanity's compassion, love, and respect for not only animals; but the people who care for them.

When I first applied to work at the Humane Society, I came in with my resume and said, "I can work any job you need fulfilled; how can I help?". I was hired in my interview a few days later and was the first person ever hired on the spot by that manager. That manager was from Austin Pet's Alive and no longer

works at NHS. Austin Pet's Alive is considered the most impactful shelter in the entire country and is making great strides on making the entire state of Texas "no kill". This is an extremely impressive feat. I was both flattered by his praise and excited to work for this organization and to learn more from someone with an impressive background. I was told they needed help with enrichment and training and would be an asset to the shelter. I was quickly disappointed. I was asked to watch the current dog evaluator conduct an evaluation. I had quickly noticed that they were conducting them incorrectly. I politely attempted to correct these errors because I was trained by the person who had developed this evaluation. Since then, I have not been allowed to help at all and only conduct training or enrichment when I have free time.

The only enrichment I am aware of being conducted in shelter is giving "pup-sicles" which is a block of frozen kibble for the dog to chew. This is honestly a decent form of enrichment, but we give these all winter long. The kennels are always left open no matter what the weather is like or whether the dog has the fur to stay warm. In 15-degree weather, the shelter was putting blocks of ice in dog kennels. We could have buried treats in their blankets, made puzzle feeders out of PVC pipe, used kongs or other hard toys stuffed with peanut butter, smeared peanut butter on a licking mat or frisbee. Instead, we put blocks of ice in an already freezing cold kennel. Enrichment can't be enrichment if it's unpleasant for the animal. This is implied by calling it "enrichment". It is clear they do not even understand the very concept of enrichment itself. For the entirety of their employment at NHS, they must not have ever heard or looked for the definition of enrichment. We could have played music, done scent enrichment with either sprays or bedding from our small animals, have people read to them, etc. The possibilities are endless when it comes to enrichment. Management could have looked online for new ideas, asked staff, or simply considered the fact that we were putting blocks of ice in freezing kennels. The dogs are not given soft toys, and as of today, volunteers have been restricted from walking even more dogs. It is my distinct impression that most of our management is lacking in the ability to justify a decision and answer obscure behavior questions. It is for this reason that the community is angry with us. The community has been made aware that our leadership does not have many qualifications at all. The fact that their training and experience are limited to what they have told each other has become obvious. As far as I know, the only training of animal care management is an all-expenses paid trip to New Orleans for a conference. Without education, they have chosen to take the word of other employees and the information in this shelter has swirled around and is full of inaccuracies. Everyone on staff received a copy of the ASV sometime near November of last year. I get the distinct impression that no one read it. It's clear in the first 3 pages of the ASV why it is such a valuable piece of literature. In those first three pages, the purpose, the audience, the scope, and format are laid out for the reader to understand the ASV's benefits and its limitations. The ASV is written by 19 people with Doctorates who must be in full agreement with anything they put in the ASV. They are Ivy league professors, shelter managers, and professors at accredited universities. They all live in different parts of the country. There are 100s of studies in the ASV that were conducted by someone with a relevant degree higher than a bachelors (meaning at least a couple hundred other people conducted these studies). The data is collected from almost every shelter in this country (anyone who receives funding from any of the major grants like Maddie's Fund). It is not an exaggeration to say this data probably could be traced back to millions of dogs and hundreds of shelters. All staff were sent a link to the Big Dog Masterclass presented by American Pets Alive which was published in December of 2022. American Pets Alive produces the most shelter-based research. They run the number one shelter in the country. They are currently conducting exciting research on the first potential cure for Panleukopenia. Despite these facts, no one took the course. All the management is fully aware of the existence of Maddie's University. It is a platform with 1,000s of hours of courses, means to contact other experts, and just about anything a shelter might need education wise.

Their lack of education is evident based on their actions alone. The solutions they have for training, education, and enrichment all revolve around outsourcing behavioral help. This is a clear indication that they know they are not qualified. Why is the shelter paying hundreds of thousands of dollars a year to employ people who must hire someone else to do their job? They do not want someone who is educated in the building because it will quickly undermine them. It makes it seem like they are influenced to maintain their positions of power; and only take action to improve when they are threatened. I'm under the impression we have lost almost every trainer we have let into the building. Other organizations in the city are refusing to work with us. These people are refusing to work with us because they love animals, and they can't trust that we do. A shelter needs the support of our community. We need people to adopt, donate, train, volunteer, etc. We inevitably destroy any relationship we form because we lack the compassion and professionalism necessary. The report made by the Dave and Cheryl foundation added a section about emotional intelligence training because they noticed a lack of it.

I have written a training protocol that was sent to management which has never been implemented. Only for the Dave and Cheryl Duffield report to say the same things I wrote in that protocol. I have warned several members of management that the techniques we use to handle animals are classified as inhumane and that if we continue to use them, it's only a matter of time before someone notices. For example, a technique for vaccination restraint commonly taught by management contorts an animal's spine and puts unnecessary pressure on a dog's trachea. The contortion and pressure make this handling technique inhumane. It is not only unfortunate that they have not taken the time to provide sufficient training for staff; but a very serious safety issue for staff. For example, dogs get out of their kennels all the time. This is just a normal occurrence in any shelter and inevitable. This is exactly why absolutely everyone needs to be taught how to approach animals properly and safely. The only commitment to do anything was given immediately after the letters were sent to the board. Anyone can grab an animal and hold on for dear life. It takes skill and an understanding of animals and how they communicate to handle them in a way that doesn't involve being harsh. I have offered to teach classes on fear-free handling as I believe it requires hands-on training and you can't become an expert taking a 6 to 8-hour online course where each individual piece of information is presented to you once. I have offered to teach interpreting animal body language to anyone willing to listen because I also believe that requires hands-on experience and reading a poster board isn't sufficient. Poster boards and these classes are the only trainings on these subjects currently offered to staff. I have not been able to do so. I take pride in the fact that anyone could pull up the fear free handling course at any time and quiz me on its contents and I would get every single question right. I believe when animals' lives are counting on our understanding of behavior, we need to shoot for 100% accuracy. The community is justified in expecting that from us. We call ourselves a "no kill" shelter and need to behave as one. The community and animals require humane and effective techniques for being successful at home. There are major problems with the fact that all the "improvements" coming to the shelter involve outsourcing behavioral advice. First, management doesn't understand enough to be critical of the trainers and handlers they invite into our shelter. Second, there will not be someone capable of assisting staff, volunteers, and community with their immediate needs. Third, why would we spend money outsourcing for help when several qualified people are already in shelter?

The community expects that those sitting on our Behavior Board (where euthanasia decisions are made) have the necessary qualifications to do so. The dogs we fail are the dogs that have more complicated behaviors. The dogs we fail are the ones where an adopter really needs both accurate and informed information on how to handle them and we simply cannot give that to them. Because no one is educated or really understands the transition from home to shelter. This also presents a very serious safety issue for the community. For example, people who adopt resource guarding dogs are not trained to trade for the possession a dog is guarding. Because of this, adopters are constantly trying to wrestle a toy or food out of dog's mouths and are getting bitten in the process. This has resulted in a lot of returns and even someone who had been bit in the face so bad that they will be permanently maimed. And for the rest of his life, every time someone asks him why he's missing a large chunk out of his face; he will say "NHS". If you access our database and read the reasons why most of our resource guarding dogs get returned; it is almost always an incident where the adopter attempted to take something from the dog. It is basic animal handling knowledge not to reach in a dog's mouth. And when we already know this dog will get aggressive if you try to take something from them, why aren't we telling the community that? The euthanasia that I know spurred a lot of this was the euthanasia of a dog named Pine. Pine was known to be aggressive to other dogs. He was sent out to foster without a muzzle or gentle lead and the foster was not counseled on avoiding high traffic dog areas. The foster took him for a walk in a harness where they did not have control of his head in Mid-Town area of Reno. An off-leash dog cornered Pine and Pine bit him and latched on. The foster was also not trained on how to get Pine to let go, and the police had to be called to scare Pine off the dog by buzzing a taser next to his ear. From my perspective, this was not Pine's fault. This was Pine being set up for failure and failing and a fault of the humans handling him. He was euthanized. The shelter continues to adopt out dog aggressive dogs without providing the necessary training to adopters. Instead, their solution was to stop sending dogs out to foster and we haven't done a traditional foster since. We have done some foster to adoptions, but that is a completely separate thing. This is consistently their reaction to incidents involving aggression. Instead of asking themselves what they did wrong, the policies they enact blame the community and dogs. This results in restrictions from getting help for our animals. This tells the community that we don't know how to handle dogs and therefore don't. I exist under the belief that if a dog bites you, it feels it has no other options in keeping itself safe. At the root of aggression is always fear. When a dog is acting aggressively, you don't assume something is inherently wrong with the dog. Instead, you should ask what scared it. This is a widely accepted belief system in dog handling and training and considered an industry standard per the ASV. It is one of the underlying philosophies of Fear Free Handling and Positive-Based training. The untrained foster coordinator now will carry the guilt of this incident for the rest of their lives while management places the blame on dogs and the community. The community is rightfully outraged about our use of trazadone and gabapentin in tandem. From a behavioral standpoint, both those drugs should never be given unless you are doing training, even if you're only giving one. Behavioral medications (especially SSRI's like trazadone) have always been considered a behavioral crutch and were never intended to be given without other interventions. Trazadone is arguably okay to be given regularly when training is conducted with severe cases of fear; if your intention is to get them off of it as soon as possible. Gabapentin is the same way. If you are simply giving them these drugs, not doing training, not doing enrichment; it is unethical. Especially because a majority of those dogs literally never leave their kennel. This is decided by dog management. However, locking a dog in a kennel and giving it sedatives with no training protocols in place whatsoever is not.

The line in which this became inhumane treatment was where we were not training them. But as far as I know, dogs were only given Trazadone for the first 2 days in the only study I have read that pertains specifically to shelter animals.

I understand that those who made these mistakes did not do so intentionally. But the fact remains that they are unqualified to put animal's lives on the line of their unfounded assumptions. And there is simply not enough time for them to make up for it. No more animals should suffer while they take the time to become educated. No one could have ethically stepped into their roles with the education they have. They have had plenty of opportunity to better themselves and have refused all help to do so. It is of mine, the report from Dave and Cheryl Dauffield foundation, and our community that education needs to take priority at NHS. We would benefit greatly from making sure our leadership is qualified to lead this shelter. There are plenty of others in the community that are better equipped to help us.

I would like to add to the board that it is my distinct impression that Greg Hall, Amber Heard, and David Smith are the 3 biggest problems in our shelter. They have expressed a lack of professionalism and a lack of compassion for the animals. It is my opinion that it is a truly heinous thing to make decisions about an animal's life when you have no qualifications to do so. They have forcefully kept dogs in kennels and refused to train staff or allow them to handle dogs. If information on how to do better is easily accessible, what would be different? Their recent actions express one thing above all else; they will not change unless under threats. It is my opinion that they lack the emotional intelligence, compassion, and humility to lead a shelter and interact with the public with our name on their shirt. I think the only reasonable thing for the board to do is part ways with them. I believe that if they remain on staff, these exact situations of community outrage are only bound to happen again. We need someone leading us who has both the expertise and compassion to mend our relationships with the community. We are a non-profit; and need to impress.

I hope I have expressed a clear lack of basic knowledge in management. I hope that I have expressed that this is not only an issue of ethics, but of public safety. I hope I have expressed that there have clearly been plenty of opportunities to improve that have not been taken. I hope that the board sees my existence in this shelter as an indication of management's priorities. I hope the board pays attention to the fact that the people criticizing us have no reason to do so and management has every reason to lie and hide the opinions of their staff from the board. I have more education than the entirety of those running the animal care team combined, and not once have I been asked to help in any way, shape, or form. All research and meetings I've had with management have been done out of my own accord. And the truth is that I have a lot to learn, and the difference is I have a desire to do so. I have only worked here for about 3 months, and this is just a fraction of the problems I have noticed. These are simply the only ones I know I'd be able to prove. If these people remain in power at NHS, dogs and the people of our community will continue to be at risk.

I'd like to make it clear that I do not wish to see the staff, management, board of directors, or animals at NHS suffer. I simply believe that my experience with NHS needs to be heard. I felt morally obligated to write this letter for the sake of our animals and our community and would not have done so if I didn't believe it was truly necessary. Working with homeless animals truly means everything to me, and I would be devastated if I lost the ability to do so. As an orphan myself, I sympathize with the situations they are in. The world I grew up in was ugly, and I'd do anything to make a place where a kid like me could see that there is brightness and hope in humanity. I could have done more to express these points before. I was simply avoiding conflict because I felt extremely outnumbered and feared for my career. I know some of the points I made came off harshly, but if you take a moment to step into my shoes, is there really a nice way to say that? Because I believe a shelter and its staff should always trust in kindness, and lead with positive regard for each other and the community. Anger, fear, and sadness are treated in dogs with compassion and love. I simply want this shelter to be the idea of what everyone hoped animal welfare would be. A celebration of the bond between humans and animals. A place where

employees feel like their work matters. Where the animals, staff, and volunteers are happy to be here. The over-arching belief that dogs are dangerous and people are not to be trusted is everywhere in this shelter. In our policies, in our staff, and in our walls. And it truly takes its toll on everyone here and everyone who interacts with us. We're not working towards saving lives; we're working on keeping animals out of the community.

Eddie Hovore was FIRED after he sent the above letter. See below.

Good morning,

This is to update the county advisory board and the mayor's office that I was terminated from my position at NHS this morning. The reason given by management was a violation of the employee handbook. Specifically for making false or malicious statements about the NHS. I do not believe what was contained in my letter was either malicious or false. As I mentioned in the letter itself, I have proof of every claim I made. I also made a point to express that I explicitly do not wish for harm to come to anyone; which does not fit into the definition of malicious. As disappointed as I am; I hope my story proves what a lot of people have been saying. No warning or conversation regarding my termination was made. I was simply terminated. Attached are some photos of my termination letter.

I did not risk my livelihood and my career to bring harm to anyone. I risked everything to raise pay for my fellow staff members who I see constantly on the verge of tears over their finances. I risked everything for the dogs who don't get out of their kennels. I risked everything for the community members who are put into dangerous situations with an animal and the shelter gives them no options. I hope that the board sees what happened today as a testament for a need for change. A testament that doing something for the sake of others in this shelter only results in harm to the individual. They are concerned with one thing and one thing only; protecting themselves and their positions.

I attempted to give a voice to those who cannot speak and was terminated. It has been my experience in life that doing what's right always costs. In those moments where you have something to lose and you do what you believe is right anyway; that's what defines a person. I would also like to share with the board that an email about the situation was shared with staff at some point yesterday. Management are calling them attacks and said anyone could send whatever they like to the board and the mayor's office. However; they said no one is allowed to speak to any news stations. Ironically, I was terminated immediately after this announcement was made to dog staff. Other staff will see what happened to me and refrain from making their cases. The staff are being held hostage by their low pay. In some cases; they are being held hostage by their lack of education to even consider that what we are doing is wrong. I wish the NHS well and my only hope is to make it a better place for everyone involved.

Sincerely,
Edward Hovore



Nevada Humane Society
Corrective Action Form

As an at-will employer and depending on the nature of the offence, Nevada Humane Society reserves the right to skip any steps at its discretion.

Date:	5/2/2023
Employee:	Edward FIOVONE
Manager:	KEVIN SUTLIFF
Department:	Intake

Select the Category(ies) of Issue(s):

Unsatisfactory Work Performance	Insubordination or other Conduct Violation	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Violation of Policy and/or Procedure	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Unsatisfactory Customer Service	Excessive Tardiness/Absenteeism		Safety Violation	

Action Type Please select the corrective action you are taking:

Verbal warning 1		Formal written warning 2	
Verbal warning 2		Disciplinary Suspension	
Verbal warning 3		Final Warning	
Formal written warning 1		Termination (Requires Executive Approval)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Details of the Violations/Issues. List dates, times, and other pertinent information. Please use extra paper if needed. Example: On 01.01.2023 John Doe was 15 minutes late to their 8:00 am start shift. They did not call or text to communicate their tardiness.

5/1/2023 Human Resources became aware of a code of conduct violation you made.
page 24 of the employee hand book under code of conduct!

① Discourteous - courtesy is the responsibility of every employee everyone is expected to be courteous, polite & friendly to our customers, vendors, and suppliers as well to their fellow employees no one should be disrespectful, or use profanity & any language which injures the image or reputation of NHS.

② Making false, fraudulent, or malicious statements to or about fellow co-workers customers or NHS.



Follow up for this corrective action plan will take place on: <u>MM</u>
Date:
Time:
Required in attendance:

You are formally being notified to bring to your attention the severity of this situation. By signing below, you acknowledge that you received this notice.

Presented by: [Signature] Date: 5/1/23
 Supervisor Signature

[Signature] Date: 5/1/23
 Human Resources Signature

I understand I have a right to appeal this warning to upper management as well as any other disciplinary action taken against me up to and including discharge.

Employee Signature [Signature] Date: 5/2/23
 [Signature implies only that this has been seen and understood by the employee. It does not imply agreement.]



This is a violation of NHS policy as per the Employee Handbook. quote from handbook, page, and specific violation. Please use extra paper if needed. Example" Page 25 "failure to remain at your workstation during working hours." Failure to follow job duties as described from job duties description: Example: Works courteously and cooperatively with other staff members.

Action Plan: Please select action plan below, then in detail list action plan steps. Please use extra paper if needed.
Example. "Manager Tom will monitor John's attendance for a period of 30 calendar days from (date to date) Any violations within the corrective action time will result in further discipline up to or including termination."

Retraining	supervisor support	improvement	warning level	termination
				5/12/23