

This excerpt has been edited for length and clarity.

The Jacksonville Humane Society (JHS) is seeking support for our Pet Safety Net program with a goal of keeping senior pets in their loving homes or safely rehoming them outside of the shelter system. Ultimately, the program seeks to keep senior dogs out of shelters. Begun in 2012, PSN serves more than 3,000 families annually.

In 2019, both JHS and our city municipal shelter, Animal Care and Protective Services (ACPS), took in 7,351 dogs. Of those 7,351 dogs, less than 1,000 were puppies. The low numbers in puppy intake indicate that services for adult dogs, particularly services outside low-cost spay/neuter, are in great need for our community.

In 2019, 13% of the dogs who came to Jacksonville shelters (JHS and ACPS combined) were seniors. The greatest reason for surrender of senior dog was owner surrender, illustrating a specific need for resources to keep senior dogs in homes with people who love them. By keeping senior dogs in homes, we can spare them the stress of living in the shelter. This stress, coupled with a dog's age and size, can lead to health concerns and result in more time spent waiting to find a new family, according to our most recent data. For these reasons, the Jacksonville Humane Society is seeking funding to expand our capacity to serve senior dogs and their owners in our community. In doing so, we aim to keep senior dogs in homes and out of shelters.

The Pet Safety Net program is designed specifically to prevent surrender by either providing resources to keep pets in their loving homes or to help owners safely rehome pets outside the shelter system. When a pet owner contacts JHS in need of help, they are assigned to a Pet Safety Net counselor who provides individual assistance tailored to each family's needs. Services include, but are not limited to, a free pet food bank, free pet behavior assistance, free or low-cost medical care including medications for flea/tick/heartworm, free supplies (such as leashes, harnesses, or crates), free rehoming support and free emergency boarding.

The greatest request from our clients in need of safety net services is medical care. This can include routine wellness, vaccines, spay/neuter, and treatment for basic ailments such as skin infections, ear/eye infections, wounds or digestive issues.

Additionally, JHS offers free rehoming services and supports pet owners throughout the process. We help prepare pets for adoption by providing spay/neuter, microchip and vaccines. Next, they are listed on rehome.adoptapet.com, which puts the pet's adoption profile on adoptapet.com and the JHS website. JHS also invites owners who need rehoming assistance to bring their pets to our shelter for the day during adoption events to help them find homes.

The Pet Safety Net program has been paramount to lifesaving in our community and a direct result has been a decrease in the number of pets entering shelters. In 2014, Jacksonville became one of the nation's first cities to maintain a 90%+ save rate for pets in our shelters and works every year to sustain that percentage. Our community's save rate in 2019 was 93%.

In 2018, our Pet Safety Net program had a success rate of 41%, meaning that 41% of families who came to JHS to surrender their pets elected to use our services, keep pets at home or rehome them on their own. In 2019, our success rate climbed to 50%.

Thanks to the Grey Muzzle Organization's generous grant, we were able to add a special component of care for senior dogs in our Pet Safety Net program. The program began in the summer of 2019 and we saw a decrease in the percentage of senior dogs entering our shelter in 2019 – from 11% in 2018 to 9% in 2019. With your support, we will continue this focused work for senior dogs in need.