

RICHMOND SPCA (VA) Brit'nee Haskins, DVM, Veterinary Medical Director-

A local veterinarian and her colleagues saw a veterinary desert in specific areas in the greater Richmond area and thought they could benefit from the mission of The Street Dog Coalition (national non-profit organization), so the group started a chapter in Richmond Va. Individuals and families of low and now middle socioeconomic status want to keep their pet(s) but feel that they cannot provide the basics or end up having to make incredibly tough life-or-death decisions for their pet suffering from a preventable disease or illness. A lot of times, providing basic wellness care can put individuals who are already at risk of becoming unhoused even closer to that unfortunate reality, so these clinics provide preventive care for as many dogs and cats as feasibly possible on a quarterly basis.

Lessons other shelters can learn- **start small, start simple**. Start with one crucial service that you can provide for free or next to nothing to anyone in your community, even if it is on a limited basis. And start with a service that does not require a lot of staff/personnel/volunteers. Reach out to your local veterinary clinics, veterinary school, LVT schools, or vet assistant programs to see if they can supply volunteers of skilled medical staff if your shelter has limited or no medical personnel. Your biggest need may be focused on being a consistent source of pet food for the community, and that is incredibly helpful and effective in keeping pets with their families.

Offer actionable advice:

When deciding on the building blocks of creating a wellness program, reflect on the services that are of the most need in your community. Something as simple as a Facebook poll or survey or having the reason why people are surrendering or relinquishing their pets is a good place to start. And use that information as the starting point of services provided in that shelter's community wellness program.

There is a photo gallery at the bottom of this webpage. <https://www.thestretdogcoalition.org/richmond-va>