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Home & Heart Rescue: An Animal Shelter Designed for Animal-Assisted Therapy

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HOME & HEART RESCUE:
ANIMAL SHELTER DESIGNED FOR ANIMAL-ASSISTED THERAPY

A Thesis
Presented to
The Williams Honors College of The University of Akron

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Bachelor of Arts

Jordan Best
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Introduction

Home & Heart Rescue is a high-end animal shelter designed to provide support to those with disabilities. The design incorporates animal-assisted therapy as a way to create bonds between potential adopters and pets. The facility is also designed to engage the community by including retail and event space.

Field Research

A successful shelter, One of A Kind Pets in Akron, Ohio, was observed. Upon entering the shelter, I noticed the retail area, where items were organized by animal—either cat or dog. Everything needed to adopt a new pet is available to purchase such as collars, leashes, food, litter, litter boxes, and dog beds. Having necessities accessible to those wanting to purchase a pet unexpectedly is a smart strategy. Retail areas in shelters reduce the ability for visitors to not adopt a pet due to a lack of supplies. These areas also create an economic convenience factor, potentially boosting sales for the shelter. One of the more obvious observations at the shelter is the separation of cats and dogs. One of A Kind Pets has about five cats in a single room of seven feet by nine feet. Also in these rooms are tiny windows, a litter box, multiple food bowls, and a chair for visitors. One of A Kind Pets has miscellaneous cages spread throughout the facility with cats that are either special needs or have feline-leukemia, prohibiting them from being around other felines. In the dog portion of the shelter, there are about eight rooms, each containing a single dog. These rooms are bland with a concrete bench, few toys, and a bed for the dog. The shelter facility also has a minimum of two offices, custodial and storage rooms, laundry rooms, and a fenced in yard.

Following the research experience at One of A Kind Pets, I interviewed three people who have experience with shelter pets and facilities. Samantha Dorland, a pound keeper for
Tuscarawas County, has provided insight on how animals could be comfortable in their shelter areas. Dorland noted a main priority for the safety of shelter animals is better enclosures. When asked for further detail, she stated the Tuscarawas pound utilizes fencing to separate the animals. She felt sometimes dogs need more privacy than the fence allows but still require visual contact with other dogs between their enclosures.

Haylee Meinhart, an active volunteer at shelters, discussed ideas on how shelter life could improve. She stated shelter animals need more interactive activity. Oftentimes, abandoned animals are placed in small rooms, waiting to be adopted. The animal to staff ratio, particularly in larger shelters, is a major issue, making it difficult for shelter animals to receive proper attention. Increasing the amount of volunteerism will relieve this problem. Creating ways to encourage the community to visit the shelter will influence more people to volunteer. Some examples are fraternity and sorority socials, fundraisers, team building seminars, and birthday parties. On a design note, Meinhart believes shelter animals would benefit from a living environment with less concrete flooring.

Melissa Scheurger volunteers often at shelters and has adopted shelter pets. She recognized an animal’s need for more time out of their cages with a larger area to play. Scheurger agreed with many of the same issues as Dorland and Meinhart.

Another question asked of the three respondents was how more animals could be adopted. Dorland noted creating a bond is the most simple, yet effective way animals could be adopted. Unfortunately, many animals are unable to bond because they have so much pent-up energy from being confined to a small cage. The animals also do not have enough personal space and time with a potential adopter. A simple method increasing adoption rates mentioned by Dorland is better presentation of the animals. Well-groomed animals are more appealing to
potential adopters. Meinhart found people understand that abused and mistreated animals are just as capable of giving love as any other animal. Scheurger noted educating adopters about the personalities of shelter pets could lessen bias towards older animals and popular breeds, improving adoption rates. Dorland mentioned the importance of a visible shelter location and ADA accessibility in attracting people to visit shelters. Proper advertising and social media also impact larger visitor rates. Meinhart and Scheurger had similar opinions, though Meinhart also stated the importance of community events. She suggested the shelter to be represented at community events not only to raise awareness, but also to create events at the shelter to physically bring people to the site.

Research

Animal shelters can be seen in communities all over the world from inner city humane societies to high-end shelters in the countryside. These facilities cater to the nearly 6.3 million companion animals displaced each year: 3.3 million dogs and 3.5 million cats (Pet Statistics). Millions of people visit shelters, looking to give an animal a forever home, making location a major consideration in constructing an animal shelter. Top animal shelters and pet hotels tend to be in larger cities, focusing on affluent markets. Popular locations are Munich, Las Vegas, Hong Kong, and New York City. With this in mind, Home & Heart Rescue will be located in London. London has a population of eight million. The economy in London is large enough to sustain an animal shelter with high-end design, having nearly 17% of The United Kingdom’s gross domestic product, a measure of the nation’s overall economic activity (The Development of London’s Economy).

The number of animals adopted yearly could increase by showing potential owners the benefits these pets could have for their families through animal assisted therapy. According to
Good Therapy, animal assisted therapy is a psychotherapy process incorporating animals into mental healthcare and focusing on relationships created between humans and animals. Shelter animals are beneficial for owners in a variety of ways. Shelter animals decrease stress and anger levels, lower heart rate and blood pressure, through the release of beta-endorphins (Animal Assisted Psychotherapy). An animal shelter designed to focus on animal assisted therapy would not only lead to greater adoptions rates for these sheltered pets, but also assists those struggling with different disorders and diseases. The facility designed with all occupants, both human and animal, in mind creates a space that allows these bonds to be created.

An undergraduate project influenced additional research on the impact of space upon people with disabilities. One of these disabilities is Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD). People diagnosed with ASD may be extremely sensitive to their physical environment, through lighting, colors, textures, arrangement of furnishings, floor coverings, and window placements. ASD has a large array of courses, creating unique design challenges. What appears to be good design for one person is not necessarily good design for another. For example, some autistic people thrive in natural light while others require room-darkening shades.

Two examples of challenges for the autistic are space size and sensitivity to noise. Many are afraid of large open spaces, such as malls, while others may have a fear of small, intimate spaces, forcing them to bump into other individuals (American Society of Interior Design). With sensitivity to noise, those with autism are often sensitive to everyday sounds such as dogs barking, cars blowing their horns, and sirens.

Another common challenge people face is depression and anxiety. Designing for depression and anxiety focuses on creating “room to breathe.” One important step in establishing “breathable” space is creating an atmosphere with minimal clutter. A simple, clean room with
minimalist design allows the mind to relax and focus on one thing rather than bouncing around. Minimalist designs are simple, sleek, and utilize clean lines. They lack major ornamentation and superfluous colors and textures (Silvis).

Another method to alleviate symptoms of depression and anxiety is through color. According to Health Design Magazine, bold colors like red can be disturbing for patients and may induce anxiety. The late Antonio Torrice was an interior designer focused on therapeutic designs for children and those with disabilities. He found a correlation between subconscious healing and the colors of the Far East. Torrice looked to India and their belief of the chakra, the seven psychic centers of the body, to find the healing powers of color. According to Hinduism, each person has seven chakras and each chakra represents a different color. The chakra for anxiety and depression lie in the fifth chakra- represented by the color blue (Silvis).

In general color theory, blue positively impacts overall health. Blue has been proven to slow down the metabolism, creating a calming effect. The color has also been shown to decrease both blood pressure and heart rate. Light blue, in particular, is often associated with health and healing (Pomroy). Those with anxiety and depression can often create a piece of mind by being surrounded by passive blue colors. Open and diffused natural light is also optimal for a calming environment, as natural light has a greater concentration of blue.

Home & Heart Rescue will have rooms for those with disabilities, creating therapeutic environment. These spaces will allow enriching opportunities to foster strong bonds between a person and pet. A research study of healthcare environments was completed by Ron Smith, President and CEO of Design at The Intersection, LLC, an architecture firm focusing on value-based designs for healthcare organizations, and Nicholas Watkins, director of research and innovation at HOK, a world-wide architecture, engineering, and urban planning firm. Smith and
Watkins examined methods used in interior design and architecture to decrease the amount of stress and anxiety to improve patient outcomes. Four key factors in reducing anxiety according to healthcare architects, interior designers, and researchers are reducing or eliminating environmental stressors; providing positive distractions; enabling emotional support; and giving a sense of control. Therapeutic environments may also be created through the implementation of controlled environmental factors. A few of these factors mentioned by Smith and Watkins are noise reduction, access to daylight, and appropriate lighting. For example, heating, ventilation, and air conditioning systems should be as quiet as possible, creating a peaceful environment. Adequate spaces should be provided to avoid overcrowding, reducing or eliminating environmental stressors. Other ways to implement this theory are visual and noise privacy, acoustical separation and finished treatments within corridors. Also important in their theory, is lighting that supports natural circadian rhythm and maintaining good indoor air quality. Additionally, color has the ability to reduce environmental stressors. Smith and Watkins note positive distractors may be achieved through things such as views of nature, access to gardens, and pets. Social support can be achieved by creating spaces where one can engage socially with others and by creating safety zones. Lastly, Smith and Watkins note a sense of control can be given by things such as a choice of artwork, way finding, choice of lighting, and privacy (Smith and Watkins).

Implementation into Design

Home & Heart Rescue is designed to have a healing atmosphere. Nature is known for its healing powers and organic shapes. The shape of the shelter is elliptical, alluding to shapes found in the natural world. The shape also creates a circulation pattern than leads visitors throughout
the space. Each animal can be viewed from the flow of human traffic. Walls in the central area are curved contribute to the natural, healing tone.

The main entry section at the south of the building features an oval shape as the back moves into a more rectangular, utilitarian envelope. The oval space of the building was designed to specifically create a circulation pattern, engaging visitors and potential adopters with the animals as they travel through the space. The shape of the shelter creates a loop with a central retail area.

The animals are located on the exterior walls of the shelter, allowing views to the outside. Rooms containing dogs are located on the west side of the shelter while rooms containing cats are located on the east. The exterior perimeter of this oval shape is comprised of glass curtain walls, allowing both the dogs and cats to have windows leading to the outside environment. This allows an environment that incorporates nature, which has been scientifically proven to boost mood in animals. A gypsum board wall separates each room with a twelve-inch wide floor to ceiling window. This narrow window, separating the animal rooms, allows privacy for the animal while allowing animals in different rooms to interact with one another without physical contact.

Dog rooms are located on the west side of the facility. Each room contains a rocking chair for visitors, food and water dishes, a high quality pet bed, and a teepee-type enclosure that allows them to have a sense of privacy. The dog rooms are designed for one to two dogs.

Cat rooms are located across from the dog rooms on the east side of the shelter. Each cat rooms houses five to ten pets. Each room contains litter boxes disguised as chests, food and water dishes, cat teepees, and objects for climbing, resembling real life trees.
The interior side walls between animal rooms alternate between four pastel colors: blue, green, coral, and yellow. This creates visual interest and allows a way for visitors and potential adopters to remember which room their favorite pets is located.

There are private rooms for animal interaction located on the north side of the shelter. Both of these rooms are designed alike, allowing them to be versatile for a number of disabilities. The rooms have the same hardwood flooring used throughout most of the shelter. Flooring like cork and carpet are autism friendly due to their absorption qualities, but would not be fit for an animal shelter. Flooring that absorbs sound often absorbs other things like urine from pets. Ease of access for those utilizes wheelchairs, braces, or crutches is an advantage of using hardwood flooring throughout. The walls enclosing the spaces are soundproofed to create a peaceful, safe environment. The rooms have large, floor to ceiling windows to provide natural daylight, fostering a healing environment. The windows also allow for nature to be brought into the space. The rooms are adorned with simple, natural fiber curtains. Those with anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder are often in need of environments with an abundance of natural light while those with ASD can be overly sensitive to bright spaces. The curtains allow a controlled amount of natural light.

The furniture pieces in the rooms are minimal and light teal blue in color. Teal is a color that combines both green and blue, integrating nature, healing, serenity, and peacefulness into the spaces. The walls of the rooms are a faint blue color resembling gray. Paint throughout the facility is Benjamin Moore Natura, providing clean air quality and increased sustainability in design. The rooms catering to disabilities have a minimalistic design to reduce clutter. This clean, simple design creates an environment that is suitable for those with ASD and anxiety and depression, among other disabilities. A lack of
ornamentation in the rooms enables the animals to become the positive distractors. This relationship allows stronger bonds to develop between the animals and potential adopters.

Upon entering the shelter there is a direct line of sight to the large reception desk with a white solid surface countertop. The wall behind the counter is a clean, white shiplap wall that displays a large logo for the shelter. This reception counter is also used as a checkout for the retail area and as a check in for volunteering guests.

Attached to the shiplap wall behind the reception desk is the volunteer locker room. Often, volunteers for animal shelters are stuck with small areas, if any, to keep their personal items while they are working. Providing lockers for volunteers will create a safe space, giving them incentive to continue volunteering at Home & Heart Rescue.

Opposite the volunteer lockers are the restrooms. The restrooms, one for men and one for women, are ADA compliant, adding to the disability-friendly nature of the facility. Each restroom has a five-foot turning radius and handrails behind and beside the toilet. The sinks are mounted at thirty-two inches and provide a knee clearance of twenty-seven inches. The flooring and walls of the restrooms are the same non-slip tile that gives a practical detail with a high-end look.

The retail area is located at the main entrance, extending back to the reception desk. The position encourages new owners to be excited about pet ownership and encourages retail business from current owners. The retail area will offer items including food, dishes, litter, and collars to beds, toys, treats, and grooming accessories. This provides a convenience for those adopting a pet from the shelter, establishing another income for the facility. Offering retail in a high-consumer area such as London will draw potential adopters into the shelter.
On the west of the shelter, in front of the dog rooms, is a large atrium space with terrazzo flooring and a whitewashed brick curved wall. The atrium contains benches and plants, providing a relaxed environment for visitors and adopters to interact with the shelter pets.

To the east of this area is a utility room with extra storage for animal supplies, and for a washer and drier for towels, blankets, etc. To the west of the reception are two more storage rooms. Because these rooms are closer to the dog rooms, they will be utilized mostly for dog supplies. Also on this side if the shelter are the shelter are a manager’s office, adoption office, storage, and event space. The manager’s and adoption offices are adjacent and provide space for files and other information on pets, employees, and visitors. These rooms have curved walls with windows, allowing a line of sight into the area of the shelter. The event space is a large area with tables and chairs on the same terrazzo flooring as the atrium. The area will not only provide an area for Home & Heart Rescue to present their own events, but also to allow outside organizations and people to utilize the shelter. This space creates an invitation for the community to be a part of the shelter.

Behind the restrooms is a large empty training room with two entrances. The training room provides an area for shelter cats and dogs to be trained as service animals. Training areas can also be used to help those with disabilities become acquainted with their animals. The door on the south of the training room is adjacent to one of the disability rooms while the door to the north is next to the therapist’s office. Next to the therapists office is a grooming office. Well-groomed animals have a better chance of adoption. On the west of the training room are both a veterinarian office and a veterinarian exam room. The office is adjoined with the exam room and separated by a pocket door for ease of access. The exam room will allow newly admitted animals to receive important vaccinations as well as tests for things such as feline leukemia.
Millions of animals are placed in animal shelters yearly while at the same time, millions of people are diagnosed with some sort of disability. A high-end animal shelter is designed to meet the needs of both animals and those with disabilities. Creating a shelter that contains a training room for service animals and separate rooms for those with disabilities allows stronger bonds to foster. Home & Heart Rescue creates safe spaces in a healing atmosphere. These areas are low in distractions and noise volumes and high in accessibility. Visitors of the shelter will find they are in need of the animals as much as the animals are in need of them, increasing adoption rates.
References


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LIGHT OAK CABINETRY

BENJAMIN MOORE WHISPY GREEN 414 NATURAL PAINT, WHITE TRIM, PINE PRIMED

WHITE SOLID SURFACE

ARMSTRONG WALLBASE

BISQUEWARE R2503

WHITE TRIM, PINE PRIMED

BENJAMIN MOORE WHISPY GREEN 414 NATURA PAINT - MATTE FINISH

LIGHT OAK CABINETRY

4" STAINLESS STEEL HANDLE BAR PULL

WHITE SOLID SURFACE

ARMSTRONG WALLBASE

BISQUEWARE R2503

WHITE TRIM, PINE PRIMED

BENJAMIN MOORE WHISPY GREEN 414 NATURA PAINT - MATTE FINISH

VET. EXAM ROOM ELEVATION

SCALE: 3/8"= 1'-0"

4'

VET. EXAM ROOM SECTION

SCALE: 3/8"= 1'-0"

1'

RECEPTION ELEVATION

SCALE: 3/8"= 1'-0"

3'

HOME & HEART RESCUE LOGO

ON FROSTED GLASS PROTRUDING 2" FROM WALL

DRAWER BOX

3/4" PLY

3/4" PLY

3/4" PLY

SOLID OAK

WHITE SOLID SURFACE

STAINLESS STEEL METAL BAR PULL

1/4" PLY SHELVES

1/4" PLY

SOLID OAK

DRAWER BOX

STAINLESS STEEL METAL BAR PULL

HOME & HEART RESCUE LOGO

ON FROSTED GLASS PROTRUDING 2" FROM WALL

DRAWER BOX

3/4" PLY

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