



COUNTY of YOLO

DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY SERVICES

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September 2, 2025

To: Honorable Judge Timothy L. Fall
Superior Court of California, County of Yolo
1000 Main Street
Woodland, CA 95695

To: Yolo County Grand Jury
P.O. Box 2142
Woodland, CA 95776

RE: 2024-2025 Yolo County Grand Jury Report Yolo County Animal Services: A Review of the Volunteer and Safety Programs

Honorable Judge Fall,

The following is a response to the findings and recommendations in the 2024-2025 Yolo County Grand Jury Report titled, "Yolo County Animal Services: A Review of the Volunteer and Safety Programs," from the Yolo County Department of Community Services.

Grand Jury Findings:

F-1: Yolo County Animal Service's volunteer sign-up process is confusing and not helpful.

- The sign-up link is hard to find on the website.
- The form is labeled "Application Form – Yolo County Animal Services," but does not mention much about what the volunteering opportunities entail. The form lists the potential tasks a volunteer could do, but the information buttons have little information. It mentions a "Personal History Statement" and a background check, which might cause lack of interest to follow through with the application, or it may be confusing to applicants.
- The YCAS website states there are "multiple volunteer opportunities," but they are not displayed on the YCAS calendar.
- Once the form is submitted, there is rarely a confirmation email sent to the applicant and inadequate follow-up on the application.
- Volunteer projects are not listed on the website such as doing laundry, washing dishes, or helping at adoption events.
- Emails and phone calls to the shelter were not answered or returned.
- A Facebook message was sent to YCAS (after no contact from the shelter), which also received no response.

DCS Response: The respondent agrees with this finding. To provide a more effective process, Yolo County Animal Services has launched a new website, www.yoloshelter.org, which features the “Volunteer” button prominently and lists opportunities ranging from dog walkers to adoption matchmaking to kitten fosters.

F-2: A robust model for a volunteer program can be found at Front Street Animal Shelter in Sacramento County. Some elements of their program are comprised of the following:

- The website has a clearly labeled volunteer page with easy instructions.
- People can sign up using an online volunteer system that lets them pick jobs, get training, and track hours.
- Orientation classes are required and occur often, so people don’t have to wait long.
- There are many jobs to choose from. For instance, walking dogs, helping with cats, laundry, paperwork, and more.
- Teens aged 12–15 can volunteer with an adult, and teens 16+ can help on their own.
- The shelter stays in touch with volunteers and explains everything clearly.
- Volunteers get a handbook that talks about safety, teamwork, and respect.
- It’s easy to contact the volunteer coordinator if there are questions.

DCS Response: The respondent agrees with this finding.

F-3: At Yolo County Animal Services, there are no training manuals, nor do the volunteers receive any type of safety training. There is lack of a process to inform the volunteers about the aggressive behaviors of the dogs or their medical conditions. This is essential for the safety of the volunteers, potential fosters, and adoption families. The Grand Jury found a safety program currently in use at Front Street Animal Shelter in the City of Sacramento. They have an official Volunteer Handbook that includes safety expectations and guidelines.

DCS Response: The respondent partially agrees with this finding. Volunteers with the Yolo County Animal Shelter are provided one-on-one onsite training with an assigned mentor volunteer, which includes safety training. Further, Yolo County Animal Services is in the process of compiling and developing comprehensive written standard operating procedures including a revised volunteer handbook, comprehensive safety policies, and required animal behavior training. Volunteers who are trained to do pet adoptions will be given full access to, and training for, the database that contains individual animal records to ensure they are fully aware of any documented animal behavior and health records.

Grand Jury Recommendations:

R-1: Yolo County Animal Services should immediately fix the volunteer sign-up process to make it easier, more welcoming, and to recruit more help for the shelter. It is further advised that someone at the shelter should be in charge (supervisor or manager) that can work with the online systems for better organization and scheduling for the volunteers. The Grand Jury recommends that Yolo County Animal Services:

- Make a clear and easy-to-find “Volunteer” section on their website.
- Change the online form to request information about volunteering and remove ambiguous or unclear language.

- **Make sure all volunteer jobs listed on the website are also shown in the sign-up process and calendar.**
- **Send confirmation emails immediately when people sign up and follow up if needed, and/or setup an automation process to respond to applicants. Include some orientations after work hours and on Saturdays or Sundays to accommodate working people who want to volunteer.**
- **Offer orientation sessions more often so people don't have to wait months.**
- **Reply to emails, phone calls, and social media messages quickly.**
- **Check and update the website regularly to make sure it's correct.**
- **Welcome feedback from staff and volunteers about the problems they face day-to-day.**

DCS Response: This recommendation has already been implemented. Yolo County Animal Services launched a new website, www.yoloshelter.org, which features the "Volunteer" button prominently and lists opportunities ranging from dog walkers to adoption matchmaking to kitten fosters. Additionally, Yolo County Animal Services utilizes the volunteer management program 'Better Impact' and continuously updates software to maximize features and customize preferences based on shelter-specific needs. Volunteer orientations are scheduled to include Sundays, as well as after-hours weekday sessions, and options for virtual (e.g., Zoom) and in-person orientations have been implemented.

R-2: Yolo County Animal Services should adopt a formal volunteer program. We compared the current program to the volunteer program at Sacramento County's Front Street Animal Shelter, which is simple, organized, and welcoming. To make their program better, Yolo County Animal Services should consider tailoring their recruitment program in the following ways:

- **Use an online system to manage sign-ups, schedules, and training.**
- **Hold orientation sessions more often and clearly explain the steps to start volunteering.**
- **List all volunteer jobs and make it easy to see what's available.**
- **YCAS has a few high school students helping at the shelter, but the volunteer program should be expanded for a greater opportunity for students and the shelter.**
- **Write a volunteer handbook and make sure someone is available to answer volunteer questions**

DCS Response: The respondent has partially implemented this recommendation.. As stated in DCS Response to R-1, Yolo County Animal Services has taken steps to improve the current application process within the volunteer management system 'Better Impact'. However, the existing high school volunteer program is very robust and includes all aspects of shelter duties by matching daily tasks with the appropriate abilities of teens and young adults. Civic organizations, including scouts, fraternities and sororities, high school and college clubs, local businesses and social groups, have also participated in and hosted organized events and projects both at the shelter and within the community. Additionally, frequent donation drives are conducted throughout the year. Additional actions to address this recommendation are under consideration and may be implemented prior to the end of the calendar year.

R-3: The Grand Jury recommends that Yolo County Animal Services adopt a set of safety standards for the volunteers that should include the following:

- **A safety manual designed for shelter animal handlers which includes volunteers and staff members.**
- **A training program should be required before volunteers begin working at the shelter.**
- **Animals that are stressed or displaying aggressive behavior should be labeled so volunteers**

- are aware of any potential dangers before handling the animal or showing them to the public.
- Training on how to identify signs of aggression- fear, anxiety, and stress.
- Training on how to properly restrain a dog.
- Training on how to safely use restraining devices such as leashes, harness, and muzzles.
- Volunteers and the public should be notified of any animal being drugged for anxiety, even if a small amount, and every time they take the animal out of the kennel.
- Training on how to safely maneuver dogs inside and outside of the facility.
- Maintain current statistics related to safety and accidents.

Response: The respondent agrees with this recommendation, which is in the process of being implemented.