Veterinary Clinics Run by a Humane Society: Is That Possible?

Kevin Strooband | Lincoln County Humane Society
A humane society run veterinary clinic – is that new?

In Ontario it is.
The LCHS Animal Clinic
How our clinic happened
The LCHS Animal Clinic – how our clinic happened:

- In 2010, the LCHS was struggling with a significant over-population of cats in our community. We needed a solution.
- At the same time the government was issuing infrastructure grants to create jobs.
- The LCHS applied for this grant and received $900,000 of our $1.35M building cost.
- In 2011, the LCHS had a wholly-owned, state-of-the-art veterinary facility.
- We began by performing spay-neuter surgeries on just our own animals.
- In 2012, we began to operate a spay-neuter clinic, open to the public.
- In 2017, we saw a decreased need for our spay-neuter surgeries in our community.
Our Clinic’s Next Steps
Our Clinic’s Next Steps:

- Decreased community need for spay-neuter balancing act.

- We are an employer of a number of Registered Veterinary Technicians (RVT’s).

- In order to maintain our mission-based work, once again, we needed a solution.

- Our only solution – become a full-service clinic open to the public.
Geography
Population: 450,000
Population: 130,000

Population: 450,000
Full Service Clinic
Full Service Clinic

- Business plan and Board approval.

- A bit of blind ambition.

- Our Board jumped at the opportunity to support this ground-breaking venture.

- In October, 2017, we launched **Ontario’s first full service veterinary clinic open to the public and run by a humane society.**

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*Humane society opens vet clinic*

Cardena Walter - Lincoln County Humane Society of Selkirk - October 26, 2017

**Lincoln County Humane Society** is now home to Ontario’s first full service veterinary clinic open to the public.

The official launch took place on the same day that the Ontario Veterinary Medical Association (OVA) held its annual fall conference in Sudbury.

“The opening of our new clinic is a big step forward for our organization and our community,” said President Claire Murphy. “This is an exciting opportunity for us to expand our services and reach more people.”

The new clinic is located at the Humane Society’s main campus on Victoria Street in downtown Sudbury. It features two exam rooms, a surgical suite, x-ray machine, and a large waiting area.

“Having a full-service clinic in this area is important because it will provide access to veterinary care for people who may not have been able to afford it before,” said Murphy.

The clinic is open Monday through Friday from 9am to 5pm and Saturday from 9am to 1pm.

For more information, please visit lincolnhumane.ca or call 705-671-3300.
Challenges
Challenges

- College of Veterinarians of Ontario (CVO).
  - Relatively simple – but preplan.
  - This is a free enterprise.
Challenges

- College of Veterinarians of Ontario (CVO).
- Local Veterinarians.
  - Upset over us undercutting them.
  - They may avoid helping you, or offering discounts.
  - They may send their compassion cases to you.
Challenges

- College of Veterinarians of Ontario (CVO).
- Local Veterinarians.
- Canada Revenue Agency.

- Your revenue may generate an audit.
- You may be required to have your clinic become a **for-profit** organization.
Challenges

- College of Veterinarians of Ontario (CVO).
- Local Veterinarians.
- Canada Revenue Agency.

**What does your organization look like?**
- Do you have community support for your venture?
- Can you afford it? Is it sustainable?
- Does it fit in line with your organizational plans?
- Do you need a clinic manager?
- Are you prepared when people come to you expecting free or discounted services?
Challenges

- College of Veterinarians of Ontario (CVO).
- Local Veterinarians.
- Canada Revenue Agency.
- What does your organization look like?
- **Can you even find a veterinarian?**
  - Finding a veterinarian is difficult.
  - Are you paying enough?
  - Production based pay?
  - Use of Locums.
Negative Attitudes

- **ANNA BAHNEY** – N.Y. TIMES - *So You Think You Can Just Adopt a Dog?*
  - “So why put would-be adopters through a process that makes them feel inadequate,”
  - From a Rescue Organization: “I am a dog advocate,” Ms. Blasdel-Cortus said. “I'm not a people advocate. If you don't want to fill out the form, go to your local shelter.”
  - “I'll go to the deli down the street and take that stray from the box.”
  - “I will no longer be donating to your organization” (Facebook review).
  - “It would be much easier and more pleasant to get a kitten from Animal Services.” (Yelp).
Positives
Positives

- Good for the animals – especially your own shelter animals.
  - Lower cost.
  - Attract more people and have more animals with veterinary relationships.
- Good for the community – to have you there as a resource.
- More community engagement = more donations.
- There are likely grants available to support your venture.
- It can benefit your bottom line.
- You have more access to veterinarians for microchip and vaccine clinics.
Fee Structure
Fee Structure

- Ontario Veterinarian Medical Association (OVMA) Fee Guide.

  - Contacted 3 veterinary clinics in the City of St. Catharines.
    - One high, one medium and one low priced.

  - We researched pricing for 4 specific items:
    - Annual check up.
    - Annual vaccines.
    - Dog Spay.
    - Blood Profile.

  - Our findings were based on using the OVMA price guideline as a 100% benchmark.
## Fee Structure – Our Findings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Vet 1</th>
<th>Vet 2</th>
<th>Vet 3</th>
<th>Our Clinic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Price</td>
<td>High Price</td>
<td>Medium Price</td>
<td>Low Price</td>
<td>LCHS Clinic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>108%</td>
<td>86.68%</td>
<td>86.22%</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Fee Structure

- Mission Based work we are doing:
  - Set Parameters – while a charity, it is still a business.
    - Means Test?
    - Accept Everyone?
    - What about the person who can't afford anything?
    - What services will you provide?
    - What services won't you provide?
Fee Structure

- Since opening we have determined that some fees were too low, for example:
  - Dental surgeries and extractions.
  - Non-emergency surgery (non-cosmetic dew claws).
- Those have since been increased.
- Be low/competitive on your “shopables”.
  - Make revenue on other items you provide.
Policy
Policy

- Staffing.
  - Communication.
  - What discount for veterinary services for staff (if any)?
  - How do you avoid cliques?
  - Do you need a Clinic Manager?

- Animal in distress where an owner can’t afford.
  - Reviewed on a case-by-case basis.
    - Payment plans.
    - Relinquish the pet.
Marketing
Marketing

- Social Media – know your message, be able to articulate it.
  - Use Twitter, Facebook, Instagram & Press Releases.
- Create a brochure – something physical for people to read and available electronically.
Marketing

**COMPASSIONATE CARE**
The LCHS Animal Clinic’s professional veterinary care team is committed to providing your family pet with excellent, compassionate care, as if they were our own.

**ABOUT THE LCHS ANIMAL CLINIC**
We offer the only Humane Society run, full-service veterinary clinic in the province. Our mission is to welcome new clients and to encourage pet owners without a veterinarian, to build a new relationship here.

**SPAY NEUTER SURGERIES**
To reduce pet over-population our clinic also offers low-cost, high-volume, spay neuter services for cats and dogs. We also offer spay & neuter surgeries for rabbits. Please call or go online for an appointment or for additional information.

**SERVICES WE PROVIDE**
We provide various surgeries, dental scaling, x-rays and extractions, flea & tick control and prevention, medications, digital x-rays and bloodwork. Our veterinarians will see cats, dogs, rabbits and other pets.
Marketing

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Marketing

- Social Media – know your message, be able to articulate it.
  - Use Twitter, Facebook, Instagram & Press Releases.
- Create a brochure – something physical for people to read and available electronically.
- What won’t you offer? We don’t provide any cosmetic surgery:
  - Declaws, ear cropping, tail docking.
- Advertise the items you aren’t doing!
- Be sure people can easily find your clinic information:
  - Make your website easy to remember and find – invest in it, it’s worthwhile.
  - Have information on the most commonly asked questions easily visible.
- Be prepared for negative questions or comments – answer what you can.
- Utilize your shelter to promote the clinic – provide every client with a brochure.
- Monitor! Watch your reviews to see what’s being said about your clinic.
The Future
What does the future hold?

- Overnight clinic.
- Expansion to include lab, blood work machines, oxygen, etc.
- *Know your limit – stay within it* (don’t offer all service to all – build resources, inventory, staff and hours as you go and as you can afford it. You don’t want to be in a situation where you have to scale back).
- Maybe you don’t open a clinic at all but create a mutually beneficial partnership with a veterinarian or perhaps VSC, to rent the space and provide consideration to shelter animals.
Closing thoughts

- Do what’s right for your organization.
Thank you

- Any questions?
- My Contact Information:
  Kevin Strooband
  Lincoln County Humane Society
  905-682-0200
  kstrooband@lchs.ca