



**Blue Earth Nicollet
County Humane Society**



Volunteer Handbook

Revised: 6/30/2025



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BLUE EARTH NICOLLET COUNTY HUMANE SOCIETY



Welcome to the Blue Earth Nicollet County Humane Society (BENCHS)!
We're thrilled to have you join our volunteer program.

Your time and dedication are invaluable to the well-being of our shelter pets, and we rely on volunteers like you to help us provide the best care possible during their stay.

This handbook will introduce you to BENCHS' policies and procedures, serving as your guide throughout your volunteer experience. If you have any questions, please reach out to the shelter manager—no question is too small.

As a BENCHS volunteer, you play a vital role in helping our animals transition to new homes by providing them with exercise, socialization, and love. You also help us advocate for shelter pets in our community by raising awareness with your friends and family.
Thank you for making a difference. We look forward to working with you!

Volunteer Mission:

Blue Earth Nicollet County Humane Society is a non-profit organization dedicated to finding loving forever homes for homeless cats and dogs, using spay/neuter programs to reduce the number of unwanted pets, and reuniting lost/found animals with their owners.

Each year, BENCHS cares for thousands of homeless, injured, abandoned, and abused animals. We are a limited admissions shelter, caring for and treating all healthy and treatable pets. BENCHS utilizes best practices and participates in lifesaving programs.



OVERVIEW

Web page: benchs.org

Executive Email: executive@benchs.org

Shelter Manager Email: manager@benchs.org

BENCHS is dedicated to both animal care and supporting our community. Pets provide comfort and companionship to people in all walks of life, and our shelter services benefit everyone.

As a volunteer, your primary role is to assist in maintaining the facility, building, and grounds, while also helping to socialize and care for our animals as they prepare for adoption. While not every volunteer can perform every task, every contribution—no matter how small—makes a meaningful difference at the shelter.

Responsibilities may include, but are not limited to:

- Maintaining a positive image with the public
- Ensuring clean, healthy living conditions for animals by removing waste as needed
- Feeding, exercising, and interacting with animals according to BENCHS policies
- Reporting any health or behavior concerns to staff immediately
- Keeping outdoor areas clean and tidy
- Completing other tasks as assigned
- Notifying BENCHS if you cannot attend your scheduled shift (call 507-625-6373 with your name and activity)

Thank you for supporting BENCHS and making a difference!



AGE REQUIREMENTS/LIABILITY

All volunteers are required to sign a waiver prior to participating in any activities.

Volunteers must be 18 years or older.

Volunteers are expected to uphold a positive and respectful environment, both in person and online. We ask that no derogatory conversations or social media posts be made regarding the shelter, as we strive to protect our organization and animals in our care from negative publicity.

If you witness or experience anything at the shelter that makes you uncomfortable or that you believe could cause harm or distress to volunteers or animals, please bring your concerns directly to the Executive Director or Shelter Manager. Open communication helps us address issues promptly and ensures a safe, supportive environment for everyone.

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES:

- **Cleaning/laundry**
 - Folding towels and blankets
 - Mopping and sweeping floors
 - Wiping down windows
 - Cleaning Bathrooms
- **Grounds Keeping**
 - Mowing lawn
 - Pulling weeds
 - Gather fallen branches
 - Planting
 - Filling bird feeders
 - Sweeping sidewalks
 - Run snowblower
 - Shovel snow
- **Building Maintenance**
 - Fixing doors
 - Changing light bulbs
 - Light plumbing
 - Light electrical
 - Chain link fence repair
 - Light HVAC repair



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- **Transportation**
 - Transport pets to and from vet appointments across MN
 - Need your own car
 - Flexible Schedule
- **Event Planning/Support**
 - Support and plan events to help raise money
 - Shift work - (rummage sale)
 - Hauling items
 - Organizing items for different categories of fundraising
- **Grant Writing**
 - Work with management to find grants that can be applied for
 - Write and submit the grants on BENCHS behalf
- **Cat Enrichment**
 - Sit with cats in a cat condo
 - Play toys with cats
 - Hold and cuddle cats as behavior allows
 - Do not go in any cat condo marked STAFF ONLY
 - Wash hand thoroughly in between cat condo visits
- **Cat Condo Cleaning**
 - Secure cat in condo as necessary
 - Dump/scoop litter boxes as directed
 - Dump water bowls – give fresh water
 - Remove all soiled blankets and toys
 - Shake out blankets and leave if they are not soiled
 - Sweep condo
 - Replace with fresh blankets and toys and needed
 - Report all abnormalities to BENCHS Staff
 - Do not enter a Condo that is marked STAFF Only.
- **Dog Enrichment**
 - Sitting in dog kennels – petting, brushing, reading and talking to them
 - Build enrichment kits out of Kongs, lick mats and other items to engage the kennel dogs
 - Taking dogs out to the rocks for playtime
 - Wash hands thoroughly in between each dog kennel



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- Do not go in any kennel marked STAFF ONLY
- **Dog Kennel Cleaning**
 - Remove soiled blankets and toys – put in appropriate containers
 - Pick up all poop with poop bags
 - Sweep
 - Mop
 - Dump water bowl
 - Give fresh water
 - Dry kennel as needed with a towel
 - Add fresh bedding and toys as needed
 - Report any abnormalities with poop or behavior to BENCHS STAFF
 - Read all the instructions about the dog before going in
 - Do not enter STAFF ONLY kennels
- **Dog Walking**
 - Leash walking
 - Long line walking
 - Wash hands in between each dog walked
 - Do not go into any kennels marked STAFF ONLY



VOLUNTEER REQUIREMENTS FOR EACH OPPORTUNITY

1. Laundry/Cleaning

- Comfortable handling soiled items
- Able to use cleaning chemicals
- Understand and follow safety protocols
- Basic physical ability (hand eye coordination, sit or stand for long periods of time)
- Able to communicate to ask questions
- Able to work independently

2. Ground Keeping Requirements

- Able to work outdoors in various weather
- Lifting, at least 40 pounds
- Able to work independently
- Bending/kneeling
- Ability and knowledge of how to use shovels, hoes or weed whips
- Familiar with how to use Lawn Mower or Snow Blower
- Tree trimming tools

3. Building Maintenance Requirements

- Basic handyman skills
- Ability to work independently
- Able to use tools
- Follow safety protocol
- Lifting or carrying 30-50 pounds while walking
- Bending or squatting
- Ability to read and follow instructions

4. Transportation Requirements

- Reliable car/SUV with insurance
- Cell Phone
- Flexible Schedule
- Good with GPS
- Work independently
- Accepting the possibility that the transported pet can get sick and will poop or vomit in the carrier
- Give all paperwork to the vet for each animal on arrival



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- When picking up give all paperwork and meds to BENCHS staff for after care
- Dogs
 - Vehicle must be large enough to accommodate a crate for the size of the dog being transported
 - Experience with dog behavior (own a dog or have owned a dog)
 - Physical ability to handle a pulling dog on a leash
 - Awareness of other dogs at the vet clinic and keep the BENCHS dog out of harm's way

5 Event Planning Requirements

- Strong organizational and communication skills
- Ability to work with the public and staff
- Proficient with Microsoft Office
- Ability to work independently
- May require prior experience w/resume
- Flexibility in schedule

6. Grant Writing Requirement

- Strong written communication
- Attention to detail
- Ability to work independently
- Proficient with Microsoft Office
- May require prior experience w/ resume

7. Cat Enrichment Requirements

- Basic understanding of cat body language (have owned or owns cats)
- Ability to sit inside a cat condo on floor or a stool
- Quick with hands and feet, ability to squeeze in and out of each cat condo without letting them escape.
- Work independently
- No allergies to cats

8. Cat Condo Cleaning Requirements

- Basic understanding of cat body language (have owned or owns cats)
- Quick with hands and feet, ability to squeeze in and out of each cat condo without letting them escape.
- Able to catch cats in the condos and safely put them in pet taxis while cleaning condos.



- Scoop/dump litter boxes
- Ability to look at their poop and tell if they are having stomach issues
- Report on all abnormalities to BENCHS staff
- Work independently
- No allergies to cats
- Cannot be pregnant

9. Dog Enrichment Requirements

- Basic understanding of dog body language
- Dog experience, owned or used to own dogs
- Able to work independently
- Kennel run is very loud, being able to handle the noise levels, without any anxiety
- Ability to read kennel signs and follow directions that pertain to each dog
- Wear appropriate attire, closed toe shoes, and long pants.
- Ability to sit inside the kennel on a 5-gallon bucket or stool
- Bending, kneeling
- Quick with hands and feet, ability to squeeze in and out of each dog kennel without letting them escape.
- Able to do playtimes out on the rocks including games of fetch, pool times during hot weather.
- No allergies to dogs

10. Dog Kennel Cleaning Requirements

- Basic understanding of dog body language
- Dog experience, owned or used to own dogs
- Able to work independently
- Kennel run is very loud, being able handle the noise levels, without any anxiety
- Ability to read kennel signs and follow directions that pertain to each dog
- Wear appropriate attire, closed toe shoes, and long pants.
- Bending, kneeling
- Quick with hands and feet, ability to squeeze in and out of each dog kennel without letting them escape.
- Ability to work around cleaning chemicals
- Scrubbing slabs
- Able to sweep, mop and scrub kennel surfaces
- Pick up poop/puke without adverse effects
- Ability to analyze the poop if dogs have stomach issues



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- Report on all abnormalities to BENCHS staff
- No allergies to dogs

Dog Walking Requirements

- Performed 12 hours of BENCHS Dog Enrichment -bucket time-playtime on rocks
- Able to handle medium/large dogs (may pull hard)
- Able to work independently
- Kennel run is very loud, being able to handle the noise levels, without any anxiety
- Basic understanding of dog body language (owns or have owned dogs)
- The ability to read signs on the kennel doors with instructions and follow these instructions.
- Wear appropriate attire, closed toe shoes, and long pants.
- Physical Requirements
 - Briskly walk 30 minutes at a time without getting winded
 - Eye and hand coordination to harness excited dogs
 - Strength to handle a 70 + pound dog— getting them out of the kennel run by keeping it close to your side and not allowing any face-to-face interaction
 - Quick with hands and feet, ability to squeeze in and out of each dog kennel without letting them escape.

If you cannot get the dogs safely out of the kennel run we will ask you to go back to enrichment activity.

SCHEDULE

For safety, only scheduled volunteers may be present during shifts—please do not bring friends or family, but feel free to encourage them to apply as volunteers.

Pregnant volunteers should consult their physician before participating.

The health and safety of our volunteers and animals are our top priorities; BENCHS will make final decisions regarding volunteer participation.

All volunteers will self-schedule on calendar located outside the dog run. BENCHS would like a month scheduled at a time. Name, hours, activity performance.

Each volunteer is responsible for logging his or her own hours at the computer at the front desk. Volunteers do not have permission to have a key to the BENCHS building. Volunteers can only be in the building when a staff member is present.

If you would like to bring something to eat or drink, please label it with your name and leave it in the Apollo Room kitchen area.



Volunteers with Disabilities

BENCHS welcomes volunteers with disabilities and is committed to providing reasonable accommodation to support their participation. While some volunteers may require support staff for safety or assistance, BENCHS management, in collaboration with the volunteer and their support staff, will determine the most suitable volunteer roles and accommodations. Volunteers who require support staff are asked to provide program details, emergency contact information, and support staff contact information. Every effort will be made to ensure volunteers with disabilities have meaningful opportunities to contribute.

Personal Appearance

Volunteers are expected to arrive at BENCHS with a neat, well-groomed appearance. BENCHS requires you to dress for the volunteer activity you are participating in that day. Closed-toed shoes and socks are a requirement for your own safety. Having a separate pair of shoes is recommended in order to prevent contamination. Please wear only stud jewelry when volunteering. Scrubs are provided for volunteers in the locker room but are not mandatory. Any inappropriate apparel may result in being sent home by a staff member. This includes crop tops, inappropriate logos, sandals, etc.

Hand Sanitizing and Washing

Diseases and parasites can be spread from animals to people by germs on your hands. Always wash your hands between moving from different condos or different animals. It is crucial that you wash your hands well with soap and water before eating or drinking anything after working with shelter animals. Always wash your hands before leaving BENCHS. Please take into consideration your pets at home, as these diseases can be spread through you.

Zoonotic Diseases

Zoonotic diseases are diseases that can pass between animals and people by coming in direct contact with the infected animal or with the animal's urine, feces, hair, or respiratory fluids. Some zoonotic diseases include:

- Ringworm – This is a fungus, not an actual worm, which shows up as a raised, red, circular patch of dry itchy skin on the body. Children are more susceptible than adults. This is not common at the shelter, and animals with known cases of ringworm will be housed in an isolated “staff only area”.
- Roundworms, Tapeworms, Whipworms, Giardia – Intestinal parasites in dogs or cats. Transmitted by ingestion of microscopic eggs in feces. (Avoid letting dogs lick your face!)



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- Hookworms – Parasitic intestinal worm in dogs or cats. Transmitted by ingestion of eggs in feces or larvae that penetrate skin. (Protect your feet and always wear close-toed shoes and socks while volunteering.)
- Toxoplasmosis – Parasitic disease. Transmission is possible from ingestion or inhalation of infected cat feces. Disease is most harmful to fetuses, and it is recommended that pregnant women avoid scooping cat litter boxes and cleaning litter pans of felines that are potentially infected.
- Rabies – Viral disease-causing acute encephalitis in mammals. Transmission is through saliva when bitten by an infected animal. All animals arriving at BENCHS will be vaccinated for rabies as soon as possible, age permitting. Many have been vaccinated before they arrive. Only a licensed veterinarian can give a rabies vaccination. Animals sometimes arrive at BENCHS without having received vaccinations and on days when no veterinarian is on-site. These animals are to be handled exclusively by BENCHS staff. Volunteers are not permitted to feed, walk, cuddle, or otherwise interact with any animals that are unvaccinated. No exceptions.

FAILURE TO COMPLY WITH THIS POLICY COULD RESULT IN THE VOLUNTEER BEING EXCLUDED FROM BENCHS.

Restricted Areas

No volunteers are allowed in the following areas of the facility unless escorted by a BENCHS' employee:

- Cat Isolation Room
- Condos that are noted quarantine
- Elin's suite (surgical suite)
- Dog kennels that are clearly labeled

Use of Shelter Electronic Equipment

Use of BENCHS computers, printers, thermostats, phones, and cameras is limited to devices for which you have received proper training and that are necessary to perform your assigned volunteer responsibilities for the day.

Volunteers are not authorized to download programs and change settings on BENCHS' equipment.



Discipline Volunteers

Volunteers are expected to adhere to all BENCHS' policies and procedures. Volunteer violations will be subject to a meeting and a written disciplinary statement. BENCHS has the right to cancel your volunteer participation at any time for any reason.

Engaging in certain behaviors may also result in police involvement. These behaviors include but are not limited to:

- Drug or alcohol use during volunteer hours
- Physical harm or abuse to animals or people
- Theft
- Destruction of property

Drug and/or Alcohol Use

Volunteers are prohibited from unlawfully consuming, distributing, possessing, selling, or using controlled substances while on duty. In addition, volunteers may not be under the influence of any controlled substance not prescribed by a physician or that alters or impairs physically or mentally your ability to function appropriately and safely while volunteering on BENCHS' property or offsite activities.

Volunteer Theft

BENCHS maintains a "zero-tolerance" policy as to theft of BENCHS property or assets. All products, property, cash, and services are considered assets of the organization. Removing these items from BENCHS or failing to reasonably secure these items from theft, loss, or damage without supervisory authorization is strictly prohibited. Any product, property, cash, or service that has been donated to BENCHS is immediately considered a BENCHS asset.

Harassment Policy

BENCHS prohibits discrimination or harassment based on race, color, religion, creed, sex, national origin, age, disability, marital status, veteran status, or any other status protected by law. All volunteers are entitled to a respectful environment free from harassment or discrimination.

Any volunteer who experiences or witnesses harassment—including sexual harassment or intimidation—must immediately report it to the shelter manager, Board President, a supervisor, or another Board member if those are unavailable. Reports will be promptly and thoroughly investigated. While BENCHS cannot guarantee confidentiality, every effort will be made to protect privacy throughout the process. Violations of this policy will not be tolerated.



Respect Policy

BENCHS requires all volunteers to treat animals, staff, the public, and fellow volunteers with respect. Disrespect—including derogatory comments, teasing, name-calling, swearing, or similar behavior—will not be tolerated.

Volunteers must follow staff direction and are not permitted to direct staff. Failure to comply may result in corrective action, including removal from the volunteer program.

Emergency Protocol In case of FIRE:

1. Call 911 immediately.
2. Use fire extinguishers if the size of the fire warrants.
3. All persons exit through the nearest available exit, closing all doors or windows behind them.
4. When emergency personnel arrive, notify them of the location(s) of animals inside the building.

Emergency Protocol in case of a TORNADO

1. All people immediately move to an interior room or bathroom in the building until danger has passed.
2. All animals are to be left in their cages. No animals are to be removed from the building.
3. When emergency personnel arrive, notify them of the location(s) of animals inside the building.

Injury and Wound Care Protocol

- **Immediate Action:**
 - Notify the shelter manager or staff in charge immediately if bitten or injured.
 - Staff will arrange for medical attention and transportation if needed.
- **Documentation:**
 - Complete an incident report and submit it to the shelter manager or Board President on the day of the incident.
- **Medical Coverage:**
 - BENCHS insurance does not cover medical care for bites or injuries.
- **Safety:**
 - Comply with all safety regulations and rules.
 - Contact the shelter manager with any safety concerns.

Prompt reporting and documentation are critical for everyone's safety and well-being.



Wound Care

1. Wash your hands. This helps avoid infection.
2. Stop bleeding. Apply gentle pressure with a clean bandage or cloth.
3. Clean the wound. Rinse the wound with clear water for five to 10 minutes. If dirt or debris remains in the wound after washing, use tweezers cleaned with alcohol to remove the particles. See a doctor if you can't remove all of the debris. Clean the skin around the wound with soap and a washcloth.
4. Apply an antibiotic. Apply a thin layer of an antibiotic cream or ointment (Neosporin, Polysporin). Certain ingredients in some ointments can cause a mild rash in some people. If a rash appears, stop using the ointment and seek medical care.
5. Cover the wound. Bandages help keep the wound clean.
6. Change the dressing at least daily or whenever the bandage becomes wet or dirty.
7. Watch for signs of infection. See a doctor if the wound isn't healing or you notice any redness, increasing pain, drainage, warmth or swelling. Seek prompt medical care. Get immediate medical help if the wound:
 - Keeps bleeding after a few minutes of direct pressure
 - Is the result of an animal or human bite
 - Is deep, dirty or caused by a metal object

If the injured person hasn't had a tetanus shot in the past five years and the wound is deep or dirty, a physician may recommend a booster. The injured person should have the booster shot within 48 hours of the injury. If the wound was caused by a cat or a dog, confirm that its rabies vaccination is up to date. If it was caused by a wild animal, seek advice from a physician about which animals are most likely to carry rabies.

Visitors: Injury Reporting and Care

All visitor injuries, no matter how minor, must be reported in writing to the shelter manager immediately.

Injured visitors may be offered use of a first-aid kit and basic wound care instructions, but only staff or trained personnel may provide this assistance—volunteers are not permitted to treat visitor injuries.

In a life-threatening emergency, call 911.



No individual will face retaliation for reporting an injury or incident in good faith. Prompt reporting is essential for the safety of all.

Social Media Policy

Volunteers are reminded that BENCHS monitors public content related to our organization on social media. Please use sound judgment and avoid sharing any posts, images, or comments that could be inappropriate, misleading, or harmful to BENCHS, its staff, animals, or the public.

Respect the privacy and dignity of all animals and individuals in any content you share. Do not post sensitive information, such as animal medical details, adopters' personal information, or internal shelter matters. Always obtain permission before posting images or stories involving animals or people.

BENCHS reserves the right to address any social media activity that negatively impacts the organization or its mission. Disciplinary action may be taken if a volunteer's social media use is found in violation of this policy.

Confidentiality Agreement

As a volunteer with BENCHS, you may have access to confidential information regarding shelter operations, staff, volunteers, adopters, donors, and animals. This includes, but is not limited to, personal information, medical and behavioral records, adoption details, donor lists, financial information, and internal communications.

Volunteers are required to maintain strict confidentiality regarding all such information, both during and after their service with BENCHS. Confidential information must not be disclosed, discussed, or shared with anyone outside of BENCHS, including friends, family, or on social media, unless expressly authorized by BENCHS management. This obligation extends to all forms of communication, whether written, verbal, or electronic.

Volunteers are also expected to comply with all applicable state and federal privacy laws, including the Minnesota Government Data Practices Act (Minn. Stat. § 13.01 et seq.), which protects personal and private data.

Any breach of confidentiality—intentional or unintentional—may result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination of volunteer privileges, and may subject the volunteer to legal liability. If you are unsure whether information is confidential, or if you have questions about this policy, please consult with the shelter manager before sharing any information.

By volunteering with BENCHS, you acknowledge and agree to abide by this confidentiality agreement.