

# Thinking of Starting a Shelter?

## Tips to Make Your Shelter Great

By Bob Church

1. Closely adhere to all local and state legal requirements and willingly embrace inspections.
2. Join Pam Troutman's STAR ferrets and pay close attention to her suggestions.
3. Subscribe to *Animal Shelter*, a journal dedicated to all shelters. It costs less than \$10 a year and has lots of good hints and advice.
4. Decide who will be paying the bills; set a budget, and stick to it. This can be difficult, especially in cases where "just one more" takes place. See #5.
5. Adopt out the ferrets. A shelter is just that: a temporary home, not a way for people to get cheap ferrets to create large collections. Admittedly, some animals are harder than others to adopt out, but most can be found homes pretty easily. I know you love them, but so can other people—educate them up to your standards instead of turning them away because you don't think they are as good care providers as you.
6. Foster those ferrets that can't be adopted out. The real difference between adoption and fostering is ferret ownership—and some people who won't "own" a sick pet will be happy to foster one. Go figure. And, oh yeah—don't charge for foster placements.
7. Charge for ferret adoptions. Nothing creates value more than cost.
8. Create an environment that stimulates the ferret's physical and mental abilities. If you don't have time to give each ferret a chance to play twice (or more) a day, you have too many ferrets to care for. It is simply unfair to the ferrets: the lack of an enriched environment is a real form of animal cruelty in intelligent animals.
9. Keep your personal ferrets and finances separate from those of the shelter. Nothing angers a volunteer more than the perception that they are taking care of or paying for your ferrets instead of the ones in the shelter. House them separately to minimize that conflict of interest.
10. Try to create a local club that will take on some of the chores and financial aspects of the shelter. This means you may not always be in charge, and you may have to listen to people who disagree with you. Are you sheltering for the ferrets or for your ego? You don't always need to get in the last word, you don't always have to be right, and you don't always have to win. Be flexible, be understanding and, above all, treat those who help you—or come to you for help—as humanely as you would treat your own ferrets. Trust me; you'll get more because of it: more help, more money, more volunteers, more adoptions.
11. Remember the 80/20 rule and *never* expect more. The 80/20 rule says that 80 percent of the work is done by 20 percent of the people. If you are running the shelter, *expect* that you will be paying 80 percent of the bills, doing 80 percent of the work, and losing 80 percent of the sleep. Expect it, accept it, get over it, and you will be better capable of accepting the workload you are getting yourself into. If you can't accept it, foster instead of shelter.
12. Most important of all, anyone can collect ferrets in the name of sheltering; all you need is a bunch of cages and some local flyers. What's hard is *sheltering*, which implies an understanding that your job is not *housing* ferrets, but rather *finding homes* for ferrets. Understand the difference? The occasional long-term occupant ferret (shelter mascot) cannot be helped and should be expected, but most of your ferrets should be considered to be in a revolving door.
13. It is better to be one of a few in an adequate home than to be one of the anonymous many in a great shelter. Write this down. Repeat it every day. Ferrets deserve nice homes, and if you want to run a shelter, then understand that your job is not *just* rescues and rehabs, but also placements into new homes with loving people.



Photo by Patty Asheuer.

Adapted from a FML posting by Bob Church, rrc961@mizzou.edu