

How to start a sanctuary workshop

An original Best Friends how-to event



Our first How to Start and Run an Animal Sanctuary (HSAS) workshop was in 1998. It was created through a collaboration between late co-founder Nathania Gartman, who championed humane education, and me. We had for some time observed people trying to start a sanctuary or

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an animal rescue group — with little or no basic information. And many of those people were failing because of that. When that failure happens, the animals suffer.

When Nathania passed away from cancer in 2003, Jana de Peyer, who was already presenting at the workshop on fundraising and photography, joined me as a full-time workshop facilitator. In those early years we offered the workshop four times a year, but eventually settled on three times a year as the most workable schedule for the staff at the Sanctuary.

Looking back, we did not have as much to offer as we do now in terms of mentoring, but it was enough. Even if we stopped some people from starting something that they could not follow through on, that was a victory for the animals. But the workshop also inspired and equipped many others to create many kinds of organizations to help the animals.

A notable example is Pam Perez, who attended our workshop in 2004. She returned home to New Orleans

and three months later bought 50 acres in Tylertown, Mississippi. Pam and her late daughter, Heidi, created St. Francis Animal Sanctuary and graciously allowed us to use her property as our base of operations after Hurricane Katrina. To this day, St. Francis continues to help animals in Louisiana and Mississippi.

Around 1,300 people have taken our workshop in the last 20 years. Most come from the United States, but we have also had people from other countries. Canada tops that list, with just about every province represented. We have had animal lovers from India, Mexico, Iran, Colombia and South Africa come to learn how we take care of animals at Best Friends.

Attendee Tracy McQuarrie, who is from South Africa, describes her experience:

“Little did I know when I attended the How to Start and Run an Animal Sanctuary workshop in 2009 that my life would change forever. After watching *DogTown* on TV, I just knew I had to visit this magical place. At the time, I was a video editor at my own post-production company and volunteered on weekends at various shelters. When I decided to head out to Best Friends, the How to Start and Run an Animal Sanctuary workshop fit perfectly into our travel plans. So off we set on our 30-hour journey from South Africa to Kanab.

“My intention was to gather as much information as possible and bring it back to our local shelters here in South Africa, which is what I did. However, having all that information at hand and the ongoing support of the Best Friends team, I knew that one day I would start a sanctuary of my own that would concentrate on misunderstood dogs.

“It just happened a lot quicker than planned. Within six months of me



Jeff Lambert

returning to South Africa, I had closed down my business and our little Dogtown South Africa was in full swing. We base everything we do here on what I learned at the workshop. They left nothing to chance. Our gardens are in the octagon shape. We just haven't raised enough funds yet to build the building inside the gardens, but it's in our future plans when funds allow. The workshop

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Many people come to the workshop thinking they are going to do one thing to help the animals, but change their minds after they get here. This is what happened to Jeff Lambert, president and CEO of Whispering Rise Farm & Animal Sanctuary in Freeland, Maryland. He had it in his mind to have a sanctuary to help dogs, but then on the second day here, he fell in love with pigs. In Jeff's words:

"In 2009, it was my pleasure to participate in the HSAS workshop. At its conclusion, Faith and Jana announced that we were now part of the Best Friends family. I have fully taken advantage of that announcement by consulting with Faith and Jana on a regular basis. Their advice has been invaluable in the past eight years through the planning and development of Whispering Rise.

"In many ways, they are the voices in my head when I think of growth and expansion of the sanctuary. Issues of adoption, intake, fundraising and growth are never done without considering what they would recommend. If their voices in my head are unclear, I never hesitate to email them. Every year or two, I'll plan a trip to the Southwest, and it always includes a day at Best Friends so that I can spend a couple of hours with Faith and Jana, as well as spend the remainder of the day at Piggy Paradise.

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Closer to home is the Animal Rescue of the Rockies, based in Aurora, Colorado, which in 2002 sent a contingent, led by president and executive director Karen Martiny to attend the workshop. Karen says:



Karen Martiny

“The HSAS workshop has been the foundation of our work for the last 15 years. Starting out as a new foster-based rescue group, we really had no idea what to expect. Attending the workshop gave us the confidence and tools we needed to move forward without reinventing the wheel.

“Over the years, referring to what we learned has guided us in the right direction and enabled us to steadily grow our organization and save more lives. Last year, we adopted out 1,282 dogs and cats who otherwise would likely have been killed in the shelters where they ended up. We couldn’t have gotten this far without the help and guidance from the workshop, and we’re forever grateful for the expertise and support we received.

— Karen Martiny

“Over the years, our organization has continually called on what we learned in the workshop to help guide us through difficult decisions and to inspire us to greater achievements. We’ve sent our best leaders and I’ve attended the workshop myself twice to refresh my knowledge. The most important aspect of the workshop is the sharing of Best Friends’ experiences and mistakes to help newer organizations get off on a solid footing and avoid making those mistakes.

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We love it when the whole family pitches in. Amanda Reitz, her parents, her brother Marcus Reitz and his wife Jen are all involved with Happily Ever After Animal Sanctuary (heanokill.org) in Wisconsin. Amanda explains:

“In 2005, my parents and I made a trip to the Sanctuary — a trip that forever changed our lives! We were there to attend the workshop and get direct access to the people who started Best Friends and the expertise of the talented staff who make Best Friends what it is today.

“We learned about best practices. We experienced the physical work associated with operating an animal rescue organization. And we were given fair warning about the literal

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blood, sweat and tears that awaited us. Amidst the best practices being shared, workshop hosts Jana de Peyer and Faith Maloney encouraged each of us to make our own way and do what would work best in the communities we called home.

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Jana and I have been privileged to meet and mentor so many wonderful people who want to do as much as they can to make life better for animals of all kinds. People have started breed-specific rescue groups for dogs and cats; begun spay/neuter programs; looked after horses in retirement; created senior dog sanctuaries, cats-only sanctuaries and parrot sanctuaries; taken in rats from medical research; dedicated their lives to helping pigs and farm animals; and become animal cruelty investigators. All of them have come up with their own ways to make a difference. Together, we can Save Them All.

— Faith Maloney, co-founder