



**TORONTO  
HUMANE  
SOCIETY**

like no  
other.

# URGENT CARE

Program Summary

## Executive Summary

For families experiencing an acute crisis, the last choice they should have to make is giving up their animal. For those experiencing housing instability, requiring admission into a medical facility/seeking medical treatment, or fleeing violence, the Urgent Care Program offers free of cost, personalized and client-centred foster care for owners temporarily unable to care for their pet. By providing fostering to families experiencing an acute crisis, we are gifted with the opportunity to see the reciprocal wellbeing of caring for our community, individuals, and their pets.

Toronto Humane Society's strategic plan is working to carve out a space for marginalized and vulnerable members of the pet owning community. We are charged with not only putting animals first, but their caregivers as well. We want to provide excellent care to our community through offering programs and services that nurture trust-building.

By employing a non-judgemental approach and working from a strength-based framework, we create meaningful and trusting collaborative relationships with our pet owners. We work to bring to life trauma-informed principles by bringing awareness to the prevalence of trauma in the lives of our community, recognition of the signs, symptoms and role trauma plays in the lives of pet guardians, staff and others involved, by integrating knowledge into policy, procedures, and practices we work to resist retraumatization.

At Toronto Humane Society, we recognize that animal welfare services are connected to larger systemic challenges. Intersecting oppressions and systemic discrimination, impact marginalized populations and create economic disparities, racial segregation, housing insecurity, compromised health and wellness, barriers to education and employment, and implications for unfair justice responses. We recognize that these issues can have direct impacts on pet owners' access to, and ability to utilize pet care services.

We strive to understand the challenges our specific community faces and in doing so, we can bring to life the interconnectivity between humans, animals, and our environment in new ways. We recognize the value that the human-animal bond (HAB) has for both the guardian and the pet. We also recognize that the best place for every pet is in a loving home. The Urgent Care program brazenly meets these challenges, through safeguarding the human-animal bond in times of crisis and ensuring that animals are kept in a loving foster home while owners gain stability and safety once again.

## Program Objectives

### **Objective One: To Eliminate Unnecessary Surrender of Pets from Owners Experiencing Crisis**

Historically, people experiencing an acute crisis without family, friends or financial resources to board their pet, would find themselves with no option but to have their pet taken into custody of animal services, elect to surrender or sadly euthanize. Not only is this emotional for the owner, but we also know the separation can be traumatic for the animal. A decision to choose between caring for your pet or seeking safety or choosing between your pet and accessing needed medical treatment, is not an authentic choice.

The Urgent Care program responds to the needs of individuals and their pets facing crisis, and at the same time, prevents unnecessary surrenders and mitigates animal abandonment.



**Objective Two: To Act as Leaders of Trauma Informed Care (TIC) in the Animal Welfare Sector**

Owners who have experiences with trauma walk through our doors every day; by embracing TIC knowledge and foundational principles, we can provide even better care. When our owners feel safe to access support, their animals will benefit. Social services have been incorporating trauma-informed policies and practices into service delivery over the past number of years. By incorporating TIC principles such as prioritizing safety, trustworthiness, choice, collaboration, and empowerment, we offer services that owners experience as supportive and compassionate in order to bring the best possible outcomes for their animals. Further, by embracing TIC as a universal precautionary approach, we serve to benefit everyone including our volunteers, owners, foster parents, donors, and each other.

We see incorporation of TIC principles in animal welfare services as both a responsive and a responsible way of supporting our community's vulnerable animals and owners and each other. We strive to be leaders by way of actively sharing our Urgent Care program development manual and modeling our policies, protocols and policies as being trauma-informed.

## Program Leadership

**Division Manager, Community-Based Sheltering and Animal Transport – Larisa Nagelberg**

Larisa has worked at Toronto Humane Society for the past 8 years in a number of different capacities. She started in Animal Care, and since has worked in Adoptions, Foster, and Transport. She has a Project Management certificate from the University of Toronto and is a certified Project Management Professional. She also holds an Honours Bachelor of Arts (Hon. BA) degree focused on Major in Environmental Geography & Human Geography from University of Toronto. In her current role, Larisa oversees the operations and care of over 1000 animals each year.

Larisa's key strengths are within the areas of program development, partnership-building, and volunteer coordination. She has scaled several different aspects of the shelter's operations, including the growth of the foster department from 2-12 people since 2020. In her role as a Rescue Transport Coordinator, Larisa managed relationships with 50+ partner organizations such as shelters and rescue groups, successfully creating 21 new partnerships in one year.

With a passion for the Human-Animal Bond, Larisa began developing the Urgent Care program in 2019 offering temporary animal housing to individuals experiencing crisis and was honored with the 'Outstanding Community Support' award from one of our cherished Urgent Care partner agencies.

**Senior Manager, Social Work – Dillon Dodson, MSW, RSW**

Dillon joined Toronto Humane Society in early 2020 to head up the expansion of the Urgent Care program. Drawing on over a decade of experience working as a professional social worker, Dillon utilized her experience supporting marginalized persons to inform every step of the UC program creation and associated training manual.

From childhood, Dillon has always believed in the power of animal healing and has worked to align her professional skills with a foundational desire to be with animals. From advocating for animal-assisted sessions for trauma survivors to providing equine-facilitated therapy, Dillon seeks opportunities to bring unity between animals and people.



Dillon has an extensive educational background in Social Work gaining her Master's of Social Work degree from the University of Toronto and her Bachelor of Social Work from McMaster University. She continues to advance her competencies to better support those she serves through obtaining certifications relevant to her field of specialization including the Traumatology Institute Training Curriculum – Clinical Traumatologist designation, the Hostels Training Centre Certificate – Supervisors/Managers (HTCCSM), Understanding and Managing Aggressive Behaviour (UMAB) and Developing Effective Specialized Response for Individuals with Development Disabilities and Complex Support Needs. She works through a resilience framework, employing trauma-informed practices and leading with recovery-oriented treatment.

### **Assistant Manager, Urgent Care – Justine Morrison**

Justine has worked in the Foster Department at Toronto Humane Society for over 4 years. She first started as a Foster Agent and has since become a Foster Coordinator which includes a partial role as an Urgent Care Coordinator. She has a diploma in Social Work from Vancouver Island University and has a certificate in Animal Psychology. Although, she is still passionate about social work, her heart is working with and for animals. She also has previous experience working in a few different animal related roles before obtaining employment with Toronto Humane Society

Justine assists in managing Foster and Urgent Care cases. Justine's key strengths stem from her aspiration of making the world a better place for animals. She displays compassion, a strong understanding of animals and has a strong dedication to our animals and their Foster Parents. She also mentors staff with her ample amount of knowledge working as a Foster Agent with ongoing training and support.

With this excitement and drive for innovation, Justine is eager to continue improving her knowledge and skills working in the animal welfare sector while creating bonds and connection with like-minded individuals within this field.

