



Best
Friends
Animal
Society

SOUTH CENTRAL VIRTUAL SUMMIT

Turning Action Into Impact

July 29, 2026



SCAN TO REGISTER!

All sessions are scheduled in Central Daylight Time (CDT)

9:30AM

Opening & Welcome

Presented By Sophia Proler, Best Friends Animal Society

9:45AM

Making Every Dollar Count

Presented By April Hylbert, Bossier City Animal Services | Susan Stanford, Bossier City Animal Services

10:30AM

Elevating the Adoption Experience

Presented By Zac Turley, Humane Society of New Braunfels

11:15AM

Cultivating Community Connections

Presented By David Mitchell, Conway Animal Services | Jennifer Stewart, Alpine Animal Services

12:00PM

Lunch & Bonus Activity - 1 Hour

Enjoy your lunch! You are welcome to participate in the bonus activity

1:00PM

The Shelter Dog Paradox: Normal Dogs in Abnormal Environments

Presented By Kellee Robertson, Norman Animal Welfare | Stephanie Adams-Hawkins, Moore Animal Welfare

1:45PM **Culture Shift: Leading Change to Build the Shelter Your Community Needs**

Presented By Christopher Hurley, Pauls Valley Animal Welfare

2:30PM

Round Tables - 45 Minutes

Transition into round table groups to connect with a speaker and other participating shelters

3:15PM

Closing & Appreciation

Presented By Leah Long, Best Friends Animal Society

9:30AM - *Sophia Proler, South Central Regional Director*

Welcome to a day-long summit focused on turning action into impact across Louisiana, Texas, Oklahoma, and Arkansas. Together, we will deep dive into regional data to uncover trends, overcome challenges, and celebrate our successes. With a commitment to our communities' pets firmly front and center, there is no doubt that we'll leave these sessions with fresh ideas and partnerships to save more animals than ever before.

9:45AM - *April Hylbert, Executive Director | Susan Stanford, Animal Services Superintendent*

Managing an animal shelter budget requires a unique blend of heart and strategy. In this industry, every dollar saved is a resource that can directly support your mission. Join us to explore practical, relatable ways to maximize your funding and stretch your budget further without compromising the quality of care.

10:30AM - *Zac Turley, Director of Community Engagement*

Discover how blending modern matchmaking with open conversations transforms the adoption experience. This session explores conversational placement strategies that remove traditional barriers, build trust with clients, and create lasting matches that set both pets and their new families up for long-term success.

11:15AM - *David Mitchell, Shelter Manager | Jennifer Stewart, Animal Services Supervisor*

Explore the transformative power of proactive community engagement and exceptional client messaging in animal welfare. This session delves into the significance of involving the community as valued partners in driving engagement, breaks down communication barriers, and creates the strong public connections necessary to bridge the gap between pets and their families.

1:00PM - *Kellee Robertson, Shelter Manager | Stephanie Adams-Hawkins, Shelter Supervisor*

Come explore The Shelter Dog Paradox: How choice, control, and environment shape behavior. We'll share innovative, real-world strategies that maximize canine welfare and empower adopters with the tools to build lasting bonds, accelerating the journey from kennel to a loving home.

1:45PM - *Christopher Hurley, Executive Director*

This presentation offers a practical, experience-driven discussion on change management in animal welfare, specifically within rural and municipal sheltering environments. Moving beyond textbook leadership theory, the goal is to provide realistic strategies for leading organizational change while maintaining trust, morale, and community support.

2:30PM

Roundtable sessions offer a fantastic opportunity to connect and dive deeper into the topics explored during the summit. Each table will be hosted by a speaker, providing a dedicated space for collaboration, knowledge sharing, and collective learning.

3:15PM - *Leah Long, Regional Manager*

Join us as we wrap up today's summit. Discover how to apply for an exclusive attendee-only grant designed to turn today's concepts into impactful initiatives. You'll also learn how Best Friends Network Partner opportunities can support your initiatives with the collaboration and resources needed to turn action into impact supporting communities.

South Central Virtual Summit Speaker Bios 2026:

Topic: Making Every Dollar Count

Speaker: April Hylbert, Executive Director

April Hylbert is a Sergeant with the Bossier City Police Department and the Director of Bossier City Animal Control. She has been employed by BCPD for twenty-two years and worked in Patrol in various capacities before being transferred to Police Administration in 2022, where she dealt with hiring, grant writing, departmental budgets, MCT/MFR instruction, and obtained her CVSA certification. In January of 2023, the Chief of Police and the Mayor asked her to take on Animal Control, in addition to her police duties.

April has since immersed herself in the world of animal welfare, with a lot of assistance from Susan, the Shelter Superintendent, BCAC staff, local rescue partners, and Best Friends Animal Society. Her original assignment was to get BCAC's operational issues in check and the budget under control but it has become so much more. April is actively involved in advocating for BCAC's needs with the City Attorney and Mayor's offices, as well as working with the City's Comptroller and Finance Director to ensure that necessary budget adjustments are made. She also handles BCAC's grant applications and fund allocations. Most importantly, she helps ensure humane treatment for the animal residents of Bossier City through criminal investigation and enforcement of City Ordinances and the Louisiana Revised Statutes.

April lives in the country just outside the city limits of Minden, Louisiana, with her family, which includes two cats, Stuart and Michael, and a very emotional Pit Bull named Voodoo, all of which were rescued from BCAC at various times over the past 12 years.

Speaker: Susan Stanford, Superintendent – Bossier City Animal Services

Susan Stanford is the Superintendent of a municipal animal shelter in Northwest Louisiana and a dedicated animal advocate with a strong background in animal welfare. Throughout her career, she has demonstrated an unwavering commitment to improving outcomes for animals through progressive leadership, strategic collaboration, and community engagement.

Under Susan's leadership, her shelter achieved no-kill status, marking a significant milestone for the region and reflecting her belief that lifesaving is possible through innovation, accountability, and perseverance. She is known for breaking down traditional

barriers within the municipal systems, building partnerships with rescue organizations, and fostering a culture where compassion and operational excellence go hand in hand.

Susan's work emphasizes data-driven decision-making, humane practices and thriving TNR programs all by empowering her team to meet every challenge head on and never expect less than what they are capable of. Her approach has helped position her shelter as a model for what can be accomplished when public agencies and animal welfare organizations work together towards a common goal.

Susan is originally from San Diego, California but now calls Bossier City, Louisiana home. While away from work, she enjoys listening to local live bands and will never pass up a trip to the beach. She shares her home with her husband and children, two very well-loved Great Danes, a spoiled Golden Pyrenees, a bossy Boxer, a few bougie kitties and her pot belly pigs. Her house is also a revolving door for countless foster animals and many barn kitties who just need a place to call home

Topic: Elevating the Adoption Experience

Speaker: Zac Turley, Director of Community Engagement – Humane Society of New Braunfels

Zac Turley is the Director of Community Engagement at the Humane Society of the New Braunfels Area, where he oversees community engagement, fundraising and adoption events, marketing, grant writing, media relations, and community education. Zac also helps guide the strategic direction of community-facing programs, such as foster and volunteer programs.

Before serving as Director of Community Engagement, Zac worked as a Cat Program Manager, helping improve live outcomes and achieve 90% save rates for both the Humane Society of the New Braunfels Area and his hometown shelter, the Kanawha-Charleston Humane Association in Charleston, West Virginia, where he began his career in animal welfare.

With more than 10 years of experience in animal sheltering, Zac's passion has always been the same: helping people help pets.

Topic: Cultivating Community Connections

Speaker: David Mitchell, Shelter Manager – Conway Animal Services

David Mitchell began his journey in animal welfare in April 2011 as an Animal Services Officer. Over the next 12 years, he dedicated himself to developing as an animal cruelty investigator, gaining firsthand experience in enforcement, investigations, and the daily realities faced by municipal shelters.

In August 2023, David transitioned into shelter leadership with a vision to build upon the foundation already in place while helping create the kind of shelter environment many animal welfare professionals hoped they were joining when they first entered the field — a place where both animals and people are genuinely cared for. His leadership philosophy focuses on encouraging staff to invest emotionally in the lives of the animals they serve, fostering meaningful human-animal connections instead of relying on emotional detachment to simply get through the day.

David is also passionate about transforming the relationship between shelters and the communities they serve. By inviting the public to become active partners in animal welfare through programs like doggy day outs, volunteer dog walks, foster initiatives, and community engagement, he has helped create a culture centered on compassion, enrichment, and shared responsibility.

Today, one of his greatest points of pride is seeing shelter dogs play together each day while watching community members actively engage with and support the shelter's mission.

Speaker: Jennifer Stewart, Animal Services Supervisor – Alpine Animal Services

Jennifer has been with the City of Alpine Animal Services Since 2008. She started out as a field officer and eventually moved up to supervisor 3 years later. Prior to her employment with the City of Alpine she graduated from Sul Ross State University with a degree in veterinary technology. Jennifer worked in a fast pasted veterinary clinic for almost 2 years before making the switch to Animal Services. The experience in the veterinary field made for an easy transition into Animal Services and brought a new level of care to shelter animals that had not previously been seen at that time in the small rural shelter. Jennifer was also part of the plan and ultimately the build, in 2011, of a brand-new shelter for the City of Alpine which also included cremation services. This ultimately led to more staffing and even more services offered by the City of Alpine Animal Services including increased public outreach and education.

Topic: The Shelter Dog Paradox: Normal Dogs in Abnormal Environments

Speaker: Kellee Robertson, Shelter Manager – Norman Animal Welfare

Kellee Robertson is the Animal Welfare Center Manager for the City of Norman, Oklahoma, where she passionately leads initiatives to promote animal welfare and enhance the lives of pets and their families in the community. With a career that began as an Animal Welfare Officer from 1994 to 1999, Kellee has dedicated her life to the well-being of animals.

In 1999, she transitioned her career to law enforcement as a police officer and eventually a detective. Spending eight years as a K9 officer, Kellee combined her love for animals with her commitment to public service. In 2020, she and her miniature Australian Shepherd, “Kimber,” founded the therapy dog program for the Norman Police Department—a significant contribution that earned her the title of Officer of the Year.

After retiring from law enforcement in 2022, Kellee took on her current role at the Animal Welfare Center, where her leadership was recognized when she was named Supervisor of the Year that same year. In 2023, she completed the Best Friends Animal Society Executive Leadership Certification, further enhancing her expertise in animal welfare management.

Kellee also serves as a District Captain for Best Friends Animal Society in the South Central region of Oklahoma and is a member of the Best Friends Animal Society Network Strategy Council, helping to advance collaborative lifesaving strategies across the nation. Additionally, as a board member of the local 501(c)(3) nonprofit Friends For Folks, she supports inmate dog training programs, reflecting her lifelong dedication to improving the lives of both animals and people.

Speaker: Stephanie Adams-Hawkins, Shelter Supervisor – Moore Animal Welfare

Stephanie Adams-Hawkins is the Superintendent of Moore Animal Welfare in Moore, Ok and has spent her career working at the intersection of animal welfare, behavior, and community engagement. Her experience spans species and settings — from domestic animals in municipal shelters to work involving primates, elephants, and wildlife conservation — shaping her belief that behavior is communication and that environment profoundly influences outcomes.

She was certified as a trainer at the Oklahoma City Zoo, is Fear Free certified, NACA I certified, and a speaker at the Best Friends Animal Society National Conference in 2025. Stephanie’s work emphasizes cooperative care, least intrusive minimally aversive (LIMA) methods, and creating systems that prioritize choice, control, and emotional safety for both animals and people. She is especially passionate about helping shelters understand that many “behavior problems” are normal responses to abnormal environments.

Her approach focuses on reducing stress, improving welfare, and creating practical operational systems that allow scared, shut down, or overstimulated dogs to decompress

and show more authentic behavior, ultimately improving live outcomes and quality of life. Stephanie believes sustainable lifesaving happens when organizations build environments and processes that allow animals and staff to succeed naturally within them.

Stephanie is also the founder of Good Mind Pet Behavior Consulting and is currently completing her degree in anthropology, with plans to pursue graduate research focused on animal behavior, conservation, and the human-animal relationship.

Topic: Culture Shift: Leading Change to Build the Shelter Your Community Needs

Speaker: Christopher Hurley, Director of Community Engagement – Pauls Valley Animal Welfare

Christopher Hurley serves as the Animal Welfare Supervisor and Shelter Director for the City of Pauls Valley Animal Welfare in Oklahoma and is a member of the Board of Directors for the Pauls Valley Animal Welfare Society (PAWS). He oversees municipal animal welfare operations, field services, and shelter management while leading community-focused initiatives centered on lifesaving, public engagement, and organizational growth.

Christopher is a District Captain with Best Friends Animal Society and holds multiple professional certifications, including NACA Animal Control Officer I & II, Certified Veterinary Assistant (CVA), Fear Free Shelter Certification, and Oklahoma Professional Nuisance Wildlife Control Certification. He has also completed extensive continuing education in shelter medicine, animal behavior, field services, emergency response, and humane handling practices.

Working in a rural Oklahoma community, Christopher is passionate about advancing rural sheltering through practical, sustainable solutions that strengthen municipal agencies, nonprofit partnerships, and community involvement. His work focuses heavily on change management, progressive sheltering practices, staff development, and building systems that improve lifesaving outcomes in under-resourced communities.