**Behavior Support Working Group (shared by Dr. Sheila Segurson)**

**Problem Statement:**

Even the best shelter environments aren’t appropriate places for animals to live long term. We know that life in a shelter environment causes and/or exacerbates stress and anxiety, which means animals with existing mental health challenges are often among the most at-risk animals in our care. Furthermore, this increase in stress and anxiety not only causes behavior issues to develop, surface or increase but also makes improving their quality of life and mental health significantly more challenging. For some of the most challenging behaviors, most shelters have not been able to find or develop alternate placement options that can successfully modify and manage these behaviors.

We need a community-based approach where the behavioral well-being of companion animals is supported through all phases of their lives. A preventative focus allows animals to remain with their families whenever it’s possible. This approach supports our communities, protects public safety, keeps animals in homes whenever possible, and utilizes housing for only those animals who require or are clearly benefiting from treatment or temporary care.

**Mission**

The intent of the Behavior Support Working Group is to:

* Identify the strengths and areas for growth of tier 1 shelters in their ability to provide behavioral support to companion animals and their families
* Support tier 1 organizations in developing or expanding HASS focused behavioral programs
* Create educational and training resources to help other organizations provide behavior support when implementing Human Animal Support Service initiatives
* Identify unsolved problems related to behavior care; develop and test solutions