

# **New Mexico House Rabbit Society**

## **Volunteer Information Packet**

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### **New Mexico House Rabbit Society**

New Mexico House Rabbit Society (NMHRS) is a statewide non-profit organization (registered 501c3) made up entirely of volunteers. We are a chapter of the House Rabbit Society (HRS) and therefore follow their philosophy, outlined below.

### **HRS Philosophy**

The following statements comprise HRS philosophy accepted by the Board in 1991, with some points further defined in 1994.

1. House Rabbit Society believes that ALL rabbits are valuable as individuals, regardless of breed purity, temperament, state of health, or relationship to humans. The welfare of all rabbits is our primary consideration. We do not, and cannot, align ourselves with rabbit breeders, rabbit exhibitors, or other individuals or groups who promote the interests of particular breeds of rabbits over others, or who exploit rabbits in order to profit in any way. This includes individuals who keep rabbits exclusively for spinning, those who show rabbits, those who use or promote rabbits as lab animals, and, obviously, those who breed rabbits. While there are HRS members who are breeders, or who belong to groups like ARBA, their membership does not imply any affiliation or obligation on HRS's part. As HRS representatives, we need to actively work to promote this basic philosophy. This means that we need to work to dispel stereotypes or ideas about rabbits, such as "lops make better pets." By treating ALL rabbits as individuals with value, we treat all rabbits with respect.
2. Except for unique situations in which wild animals are being nursed or rehabilitated, it is in the best interest of wild rabbits that human intervention be held to a minimum.
3. Domestic rabbits are not the product of natural selection, but rather of human interference by means of breeding programs, and the product is a human-dependent animal who needs protection. It is therefore a human responsibility that these animals be cared for in a manner appropriate to their needs.
4. It serves the best interest of domestic rabbits to be neutered or spayed, to live in human housing where supervision and protection are provided, and to be treated for illnesses by veterinarians. This point is central to HRS philosophy. ALL of our companion rabbits and foster rabbits, unless there is a medical situation that precludes safe surgery, must be spayed or neutered. We cannot allow unneutered or unspayed adult rabbits to be adopted out. To do so, even for financial reasons, goes against this basic philosophical point. Additionally, our rabbits must be kept in human housing. Human housing is defined as either living in our home with us, or in housing which is temperature controlled and has a human-sized door and which is easily accessible to the human home. Many long-term rescuers have established sanctuary-like situations for their "unadoptable" rabbits, and these situations may not always fit this

specification. But for most of us, at least some of our rabbits must be housed indoors, with humans. To be an HRS foster home, and to not have at least one rabbit living as a companion indoors makes us look hypocritical. For both of these points, the need for spay/neuter, and the need for human housing, we must, as HRS representatives, take an active stance in encouraging others to spay and neuter their rabbits, and to house them indoors. This also means that we need to actively discourage the breeding of rabbits, and the keeping of rabbits in hutches, or outdoors in the yard. If we do not do this, then we are not fulfilling one of the most primary obligations of HRS.

5. Domestic rabbits are companion animals and should be afforded at least the same individual rights, level of care, and opportunity for longevity as is commonly afforded to dogs and cats who live as human companions. When we speak of rights for rabbits, we're discussing the right to be provided with a safe living arrangement, nourishing food, a loving environment, and the ability to exercise and play. We're also referring, however, to a more fundamental right: the right to exist as rabbits without having to fulfill some other human-stated purpose. When we expect rabbits to provide education for children, to sit on our laps while we watch TV, or to be perfectly well-behaved, non-destructive creatures, we do not allow them this right. When we portray rabbits as always cute and cuddly, when we dress them up in human clothes for amusement, or when we demand that they look or behave in ways that are not appropriate to them as a species and as individuals, then we deny them this right.

6. Rabbits are intelligent, social animals who require mental stimulation, toys, exercise, environmental activity, and social interaction (from, as appropriate, people, other rabbits or other animals).

### **Chapter Manager and the Board of Directors**

The NMHRS Chapter Manager is appointed by national HRS. The role of the Chapter Manager is to manage the chapter, including all operations and anything related to a rabbit. Volunteers may not do anything in the name of NMHRS without the Chapter Manager's approval.

The board is elected every January by the current board, but throughout the year the president may appoint people to fill empty positions. The board is less involved in the day-to-day decisions of the group but plays a large role in maintaining our mission.

Here are some examples of what each role oversees:

#### Chapter Manager

- Vet care
- Events
- Volunteers
- Digital, social, and print media
- Chapter communications
- Foster rabbits

#### Board

- Major financial decisions
- Staying within the mission
- Legal matters
- Reviewing chapter performance

### **The Google Group E-mail**

Once you have become an NMHRS volunteer you will be added to the NMHRS volunteer email group which is used to send out volunteer communications from the Chapter Manager, such as event announcements and foster requests. If you have not received any emails within two weeks of becoming a volunteer please contact the Chapter Manager.

## **Shelter Support**

NMHRS volunteers must follow the rules and protocols of any shelter they are volunteering at. It is important to remember that while NMHRS has partnerships with local shelters, they remain separate entities. Volunteers should not use their NMHRS volunteer status to host events, perform actions, or create materials for a shelter without the consent of the Chapter Manager. We try to provide the Albuquerque and Santa Fe shelter with the following help:

- Volunteers to clean cages and care for and socialize the rabbits
- Foster homes
- Medical care for rabbits who can no longer be helped by the shelter
- Help with promotion of shelter rabbits
- Information packets for adopters
- Cages and other supplies
- Training to staff

## **Fosterers**

Fostering is an area of volunteering that we are always in need of. NMHRS urges all volunteers to consider fostering.

All foster rabbits must be approved by the NMHRS Chapter Manager prior to being taken in. Any bunnies taken in by a volunteer without proper approval become the sole responsibility of said volunteer. Fosterers are required to attend a Bunny 101 class and may or may not be asked to sign a foster agreement/contract.

Fostering requires time, dedication, and commitment. Foster homes must be committed to caring for their rabbits until a suitable adoptive home is found or for the duration of the rabbit's life. In some cases when fostering for a shelter, the fosterer will have the option to return the rabbit to the shelter once the foster is considered adoptable. The foster home is expected to pay for food and general supplies and whatever special items they choose for their home. It is also expected that the fosterer has basic rabbit medical supplies.

The fosterer is NOT expected to pay for the foster's spay/neuter surgery. Other vet bills will be paid for by NMHRS ONLY if the Chapter Manager has previously approved the treatment, which includes the practice at which the treatment was performed. The Chapter Manager has the right to refuse to pay for or reimburse a fosterer for any vet bills that were not approved.

All foster homes are responsible for providing the Chapter Manager with photographs and bios of their adoptable rabbits within a week of the foster becoming eligible for adoption. Upon application approval, the Chapter Manager will put the potential adopter in contact with the fosterer to arrange a meet and greet.

We understand that fosterers often form a connection with their foster rabbit and don't want to give them up. We encourage you to remember that when you adopt out your foster to a great home, you are then able to help another rabbit who needs a foster home. As this cycle continues, you have now helped multiple rabbits instead of just one.

## **Bondings**

Many people come to us wanting to get a friend for their rabbit, and most of them are too nervous to do the bonding themselves. When this happens, we try to send the rabbits home with a volunteer who will attempt to bond them. This is a great opportunity for any volunteer who may want to foster but is worried about the time commitment or the emotional attachment. Bondings last no more than three weeks and the sessions are done on your own schedule. No experience needed – it's easy to learn and the reward of helping bunnies find a lifelong partner is immeasurable.

## **Courtesy Listings**

In the event that someone wants to rehome their pet rabbit without surrendering them to a shelter, NMHRS offers a courtesy listing. The rabbit **MUST** be spayed/neutered to be eligible and proof of spay/neuter must be submitted to the Chapter Manager along with a signed courtesy listing agreement. After the Chapter Manager approves, the rabbit is promoted on NMHRS's social media channels and PetFinder page, and the rabbit is allowed to attend NMHRS adoption events.

## **Intake Policies**

Our policy is to rescue rabbits only from shelters and not from the general public. We take in rabbits as we have space in open foster homes.

## **Events**

NMHRS hosts an adoption event in Albuquerque every second Saturday of each month from 11:00am-3:00pm. Volunteers are asked to arrive at 10:30am to help set up and to plan to stay until 3:30pm to help pack up. The location usually alternates between the Eastside shelter and a PetSmart. The date may change depending on holidays. We offer free bunny nail trims at each event and always need volunteers to help trim nails. We can train you on how to trim nails if you are interested.

Santa Fe adoption events are hosted a few times a year at PetSmart and also offer free nail trims.

Fosterers who want to bring their foster to an adoption event must inform the event organizer to ensure that there are enough supplies brought for the foster. NMHRS fosters (fosters who belong directly to NMHRS and not to a shelter) get priority space at every adoption event and may not get bumped for a shelter rabbit.

Volunteers are welcome to organize events, adoption or otherwise, but the event must be approved by the Chapter Manager. Volunteers may not use their status as an NMHRS volunteer to promote non-NMHRS events.

## **Logo and Media**

Any use of the New Mexico House Rabbit Society logo, in any of its forms, must be approved by the Chapter Manager.

All public-facing NMHRS materials must be approved by the Chapter Manager.

Any volunteers assisting with the management of an NMHRS social media channel must post appropriate content and communicate with followers professionally. Volunteers may not promote events, products, services, etc. that are not sponsored by NMHRS unless approved by the Chapter Manager. When communicating with followers, volunteers must ensure they are stating facts on behalf of NMHRS and not personal opinions. If someone wants to donate to, volunteer with, or complete any other charitable act for NMHRS, the social media volunteer may not try to persuade the person to complete the act for another organization. Such messages received on the channel in addition to any messages requesting something from NMHRS should be directed to the Chapter Manager. Violation of the policies stated in this paragraph will result in the volunteer losing management privileges of the channel.

## **Trappings**

NMHRS receives reports of stray rabbits very frequently. When this happens, we go trap the rabbit(s) and bring them to the local shelter. Sometimes the area is very large and/or there are too many rabbits so a roundup is called. Roundups are larger groups of volunteers who work together to trap the rabbit(s). Roundup calls are emailed to the volunteer group. No experience is needed to attend a roundup, but please be prepared for physical activity.

## **Behind-The-Scenes Volunteering**

As a 100% volunteer-run statewide organization, it takes a lot more than rabbits to keep NMHRS running. There are a lot of opportunities for volunteers to make an impact without needing to leave their home. For example, volunteers with photoshop skills can help make event posters, or volunteers with Microsoft Office skills can help create or maintain internal documents. From web development to project management, there is an area in NMHRS where you can comfortably use your talents. Let the Chapter Manager know what you like to do so they can find the right project for you.

## **Educators**

All chapters of the House Rabbit Society have an elite group of volunteers called "educators." Interested volunteers must apply, be approved, and then pass a rigorous exam. Educator status must be renewed every year by meeting the qualifications set by the Chapter Manager. Additionally, educators may speak at community events or manage the NMHRS hotline. It is recommended that volunteers work with NMHRS for a year before applying.

## **Transports**

Albuquerque is part of the Bunderground Railroad which means that sometimes a van full of rabbits stops in Duke City on its way to their final destination. NMHRS houses them for the night, cleans their carriers, gives them wellness exams, feeds them, and then packs them up the next morning. Transports are a lot of work so we always need as many volunteers as possible. No experience is necessary.

## **Newsletter**

A digital newsletter is produced twice a year. All volunteers are welcome to contribute.

## **Memberships**

NMHRS currently does not offer a membership program, but all volunteers are encouraged to become members of the national House Rabbit Society. Please visit [www.rabbit.org](http://www.rabbit.org) to become a member.

## **Bunny Sitting**

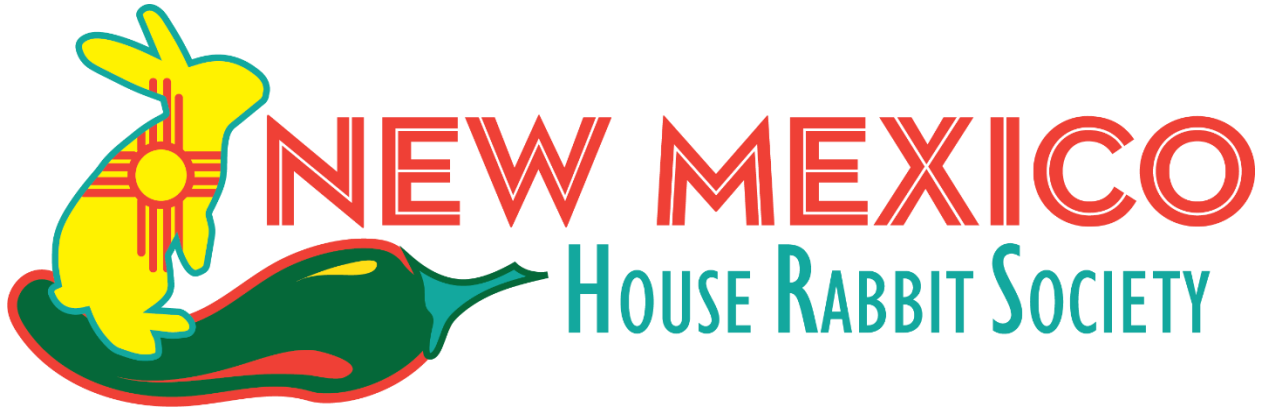
NMHRS receives many requests for bunny sitters. These requests are forwarded to the volunteer group. You may bunny sit for your own profit or you may request that the rabbit owner makes a donation to NMHRS.

## **Chapter Policies**

All volunteers must agree with and abide by the policies stated above. Any volunteer found in violation will not be permitted to volunteer in the areas of violation and/or to continue working with the chapter.

Volunteers represent NMHRS and HRS in general and should act accordingly. Familiarize yourself with the policies in this document. If you are ever asked a question that you don't know the answer to, please direct the asker to the Chapter Manager. Any media inquiries should be directed to the Chapter Manager.

You are not considered an official NMHRS volunteer until you have signed and returned the following page.



## Volunteer Contract

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

I have read the NMHRS volunteer packet and agree to comply with the volunteering policies and mission statement of New Mexico House Rabbit Society.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Cell Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ City: \_\_\_\_\_

I am interested in volunteering in the following ways (select as many as you'd like):

- Volunteering at the shelter
- Trapping stray rabbits
- Graphic design
- Web design/building
- Social media
- Using my skills in Microsoft Excel, Word, or PowerPoint
- IT
- Fostering
- Bonding
- Helping at adoption events
- Bunny sitting
- Fundraising
- Project management
- Other (please specify below)

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Please sign this page and return to the Chapter Manager via email at [Kirstin@NewMexicoHRS.org](mailto:Kirstin@NewMexicoHRS.org)