

Honors College Senior Capstone Reflection  
“Helping Paws: The Fostering Friendships Initiative”  
Alexa Trees  
Department of Animal and Veterinary Sciences  
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**Introduction:**

“Helping Paws: The Fostering Friendships Initiative” is an original business plan created for the Honors College Senior Capstone. An average of around 415,000 children and youth reside in the United States foster care system at any given time, and the number of animals in rescues across the U.S. sits at about 7,000,000. Both groups have something in common. In one way or another, both groups need healing, normalcy, comfort, and structure. With Wyoming having the smallest population out of all states in the nation, one may believe that the issues surrounding children in foster care and animals in a shelter situation are less than those in surrounding states. This is not the case.

In reality, the number of children in foster care in Wyoming is readily comparable to those in other states. For many years, articles and research studies have been produced showing the importance of a child having an animal in their life while growing up. It gives these children and youth a sense of responsibility and purpose while also giving them a companion. Growing up, I was consistently around children that had, by no fault of their own, found themselves surviving in the foster care system. These were people I went to school with, people that I met at church or met through family friends. Even today I am still friends with people that during their formative years grew up in the broken foster care system of the United States. A few of my friends that grew up in this system, I spoke to, asking them things that they wish could have been different or something that they were thankful for in their foster home. Each of them had one thing in common, the presence or wish for an animal in their home.

I have always been drawn to helping those that need some extra comfort, whether it be animals or humans. Walking through life with my passion for helping those around me, specifically animals, I came to realize something about the species that reside in and alongside the human population of the world. Animals have a sixth sense, a way of understanding a feeling and need in humans that we may not be always able to express in a way that another human would be able to help us. As I continued the process of determining what exactly to do for the Honors College Senior Capstone, I kept getting drawn back to the idea of finding a way to combine those in foster care and animal rescue. After researching for days any organizations that may provide a bridge between children in foster care and animals in a shelter situation, all searches came up empty. There was nothing filling this void. This is where “Helping Paws: The Fostering Friendships Initiative” comes into play.

Since entering the honors college in 2017 I knew that whatever my Senior Capstone was, I wanted it to be a way that I could give back to my community and continually give back for years to come. This is why I created a business plan for a non-profit organization that will partner children and youth in foster care with a local rescue or shelter animal. I wanted these children to be able to experience the process of bonding and growing a friendship with an animal or further a passion of working alongside animals. In giving these youth a chance to heal and work alongside these animals they are also providing a service to their community by prepping these animals for adoption. The final product of this project is a thorough business plan for a non-profit organization with the goal to fully enact upon my completion of my doctorate in Veterinary Medicine and subsequent move back to my home state of Wyoming.

**Inspiration and Process:**

I was inspired to create this business plan for a non-profit organization after my experience of working with different foster care organizations, speaking with my friends that had been in the foster care system, and volunteering and working alongside multiple animal rescue organizations. I noticed the joy experienced by children and youth in foster care when therapy animals would come to visit them, whether it be in a court setting or at home. After my seven years of working in a veterinary clinic setting, and about ten years of volunteering with multiple animal rescue groups I noticed something when animals were around children, especially those in foster care. Many times, there was an overwhelming sense of connection and internal calm that would occur, something that I had never seen happen between children and youth in foster care with an adult. This connection that I witnessed was part of what inspired me to create a business plan for this organization that I plan on bringing to fruition in the future years.

I began this process of creating a business proposal for a non-profit organization with a lot of research. I had the experience of working with youth, both in and out of foster care, and I had the experience of working in animal rescue for years. At the beginning I believed that creating a business proposal would be a piece of cake. I am a decent enough writer, and I had the passion to fuel this process. The issue was, I had no idea of how to write a business proposal. Throughout my college experience I had never once taken a business class, so the work of looking at many examples, the “dos and don’ts”, and reaching out to local non-profits for guidance and recommendations, was where I began my process. As the process continued I reached out to people around me that I knew had taken business courses or were business majors. They provided some guidance and at times read over the plan as I progressed to make sure that I was on the right track.

The reason I chose to create a business plan rather than doing something else for the Senior Capstone is because I wanted to create something that would give me the opportunity to give back to the communities that raised me for years to come. This process was not to just produce a theoretical business plan for a theoretical non-profit organization. This is a project that I plan on fully introducing to the world, entirely setting up this non-profit organization when I return to my home state of Wyoming after completing my doctorate. This business plan is not something that I plan on having sit in an online database for years to come, lost to the void of the internet. That was why I knew this business plan had to be perfect. I needed to connect to the hearts and minds of those that would read it while at the same time giving them a clear picture of my vision for this organization.

As I went through the process of writing this business plan I had to continually keep in mind who I would present this to in the future because while this is something that those in the Honors College will review and read, my true audience is for those in my future. This is something I will one day present to future board members of my organization, potential donors, and volunteers. This business plan is something I will use to convince people one day that my organization has a true vision with a strong and steady plan in place that will accurately provide a needed service to those in our community.

**Conclusion: (strengths and challenges):**

“Helping Paws: The Fostering Friendships Initiative” taught me many things throughout the process of creating a business plan. This process provided me a plan for something I have been passionate about for a long time and it gave me the chance to dive head first into learning exactly how to begin plans for a successful non-profit organization. Just beginning the process was definitely the most difficult challenge that I faced. As an Animal and Veterinary Sciences major I am more used to doing lab work and different experiments, but I enjoyed the challenge that I created for myself by going outside of my comfort zone and outside of what I know. Besides that, I am someone that is very used to working independently, and at times it was a challenge for me to reach out to others for help because I was so determined to figure out things on my own. When it came down to it though, I realized how beneficial it was to open up to people, admit I was struggling, and ask for help.

This process also gifted me by showing me strengths that I did not know I had. I found that I did have the ability to accurately write and convey my passions for this project without seeming pushy. I found out that I can ask people for help and that I do not need to be nervous about doing so because many times these people were excited and wholly willing to help me in whatever way they could in guiding me through my project. This project gave me confirmation that I am on the right track both with my degree choice, with my decision to one day start this non-profit organization, and with my career path.

Writing this business plan helped me in developing new skills while providing me a new experience that will be useful in my future. This project, through my research, gave me a different insight into the culture and opportunities surrounding foster care and animal rescue in Wyoming. “Helping Paws: The Fostering Friendships Initiative” has provided me with a solid base to create a non-profit organization with people and animals that I am passionate about creating a better world for. It has opened my eyes to things I was unaware of before diving deep into creating this business plan and I hope that as I truly begin this organization in the future that it will be the gift that keeps on giving for the well-being of youth in foster care and animals in a shelter situation for years to come.