

Informational Interview

Tawny Hammond

National Director of Learning Advancement

Best Friends Animal Society

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Interview conducted by phone due to interviewee's travel plans.

• ***How did you get into this field/industry/position?***

Tawny was in the Parks and Recreation field and started initially doing some consultation working with animal services folks. She was in business before that and never thought she'd end up in parks and recreation, but was asked to consult then and fell in love with it because every day was different— she was always learning new things and was involved in marketing, kids programs, senior programs, and contributing to community wellness. She used her journalism and psychology background and public relations education to interact with people and make their lives better.

She was in that field for 25 years, then started engaging with the animal shelter. She started using the parks to do fundraisers for rescues and other pet friendly events, creating programming for pets AND people. They didn't have a lot of pet friendly programs, so she launched those in the parks and through that got connected to rescues, e.g. directing boy scouts and girl scouts projects to the shelters. The shelter was very sad and uncared for, so they wanted to help make it better. Tawny was afraid of the suffering she might see in the shelter, but she started to interact more and then

did an internship with the county executives office in executive leadership training. They asked her to apply for the shelter director position, so she did and took the job!

She was appalled that they were only saving 70% of the animals in the shelter, so she started to educate herself on how to do better. She knew how to balance a budget, create a schedule, work with people, marketing, comms, but needed to learn more about animal services. She realized there was lack of clarity and dissension across the field. They were killing animals for convenience, which she stopped immediately. She realized this was a calling for her and about the wellness of the community, just like parks and recreation. They're also not well funded and have to be resourceful, scrappy, and make things work with the community holding them accountable.

She was hired as chief animal services in Austin, Texas and thought she was there for the long haul, but found out that Best Friends was hiring regional directors, and she was looking to move back to the midwest where her family lived. She talked to leadership at Best Friends about the job, which was in its infancy and still being developed, but she decided to take a pay cut in order to take the job. She wanted to help more people and more communities instead of just one shelter/community.

The learning advancement program didn't exist when she was hired, but Best Friends leadership asked her if she would lead it. They were thinking of doing an accreditation process or maybe a certification. They decided to focus on certification programs and started with research about what already existed— where were they, what they did, where the focus was; they identified one at the University of the Pacific, but these didn't focus on lifesaving programs.

The department started out with just Tawny, then she met Aimee Charlton, who has a MA in education and Tina Overgaard who was a volunteer who was the first hire in the program, she has a master's in instructional design. Tawny went back to the drawing board to learn everything she could about adult education. They learned as they went. They constantly re-evaluate the modules and change it to make sure it's dynamic and evolving.

Julie Castle graduated from SUU in the early nineties and was being recognized as an outstanding graduate, and Aimee Charlton and her family were in attendance as alumni and locals. Aimee knew that Tawny's dream was to make animal services a discipline so that kids could aspire to be in animal services as a fully developed profession. Aimee thought, why not SUU? It's close to Best Friends' headquarters in Kanab and there is already a connection. SUU already had a partnership with the national parks in their interdisciplinary studies program and were very interested in collaborating from the president of the university on down.

Tawny says that this program is dedicated to professionalizing a profession. Standardizing processes based on proven practices so that all people working in this profession know the best way to do things and there doesn't need to be dissent or conflict. They want to make animal services an established discipline and are busy creating an institute with a research center.

• ***What is a typical day like for you?***

Sit in a chair behind a computer! Haha. But seriously, lots of virtual meetings working with people across the country in different time zones. She works harder now than when she was in the field especially in terms of having tons of meetings and no

time to get to work. She works with all departments across BFs. She has 7 people on her team. Don Jennings, Lauren Lee, Cathie Myers, Tina Overgaard, Aimee Charlton, Julie Guerra working together to get programs launched.

• ***What do you like most about your work?***

She likes that they're doing work that will leave a legacy behind; the history books will be written based on what they're doing now. They'll be a part of social history for the sake of people and their pets, contributing to social justice. She loves helping people solve problems and knowing they're not alone. She remembers feeling like she would lose her job for trying to do the right thing, and she wants to turn doing the right thing into an established practice in the field.

• ***What do you like least about your work?***

Sitting around so much and not being up and moving.

• ***How does your job affect your lifestyle?***

She loves to be active, so she is able to get out and exercise and be outside since she has a flexible schedule working from home. She eats better because she's at home. She can work when she needs to and not just during business hours. She doesn't have to drive anywhere to go to work and can wear comfortable clothing. She loves the national work, touching people everywhere across the country.

• ***How do most people get into this field/industry/position?***

Two main pathways currently— most people have been in the industry for a while and have come up through many changes. The folks that have been here forever and haven't quit and are still working at it are amazing people for sticking with it and learning and growing. A lot of people are transferring in from other fields like Ed

Jameson and Paula Powell and Rebecca Guinn. Now we're working to create academic pathways for new people to enter the field in a different way through degrees and professional development.

• ***What kind of education, training, or background does your job require?***

Tawny has her BA and now an MIS from SUU. Her extensive background in public service helps her a lot. She learned “how to learn” in her BA, but her MIS allowed her to do more critical thinking, research, and communications about what she'd learned. Some level of experience in higher education is needed for her role. Municipal experience and non-profit work is helpful too.

• ***What skills/abilities/attributes are essential to success in your job/field/industry?***

Intellectual curiosity and a growth mindset is a must. Continuing evolution as a person and not thinking you have all the answers. Emotional intelligence and personal relations skills are necessary. Sense of urgency and ability to not waste people's time.

• ***What should I be doing during my MIS to prepare to seek a position in this field?***

Doing a capstone related to the program and the goal of ending the killing of shelter animals, something that can be implemented. Become part of the institute as it develops.

• ***What advice would you give someone who is considering this type of job/field/industry?***

Make sure you understand what success looks like. You want to get it right, not be right. Make sure that you adhere to proven practices. Remember what it's all about — there is an urgency to saving lives, but animal services, animal control, etc is a


community ethic, not a building. It's a system that you have to work within. There are proven programs, policies, and procedures that you work within to achieve results, so don't hitch your wagon to an organization that doesn't care about the bottom line of animals' lives on the line.

• ***If you were to do it all over again, what would you do differently?***

She wouldn't do anything differently— she learned from all her mistakes. All the times she fell down and was afraid of being fired, all the heartache, bad bosses, etc were teachers and they got her to where she is today. She doesn't want to regret the path that brought her to where is now.

Thank you note sent to Tawny after the interview:

MIS Assignment Help +

 Jess Roper 👍 ↶ ↷ → …
Thu 9/23/2021 5:04 PM
To: Tawny Hammond

Hi Tawny,

Thank you so much for giving me some of your time today for this interview.

I learned a lot from you, and I enjoyed hearing about the winding path that brought you to your current role making such a big difference for current and aspiring animal services professionals around the country (as well as the people and animals they serve!).

Your insights and feedback are incredibly helpful as I embark on this journey through the MIS program, and I look forward to continued conversations and collaboration. I will send a separate email to you and Aimee to talk more about a capstone project that will contribute to furthering animal services as a discipline.

Again, I am so grateful for the opportunity to connect with you today and safe travels!

Cheers,

Jess

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