



A Primer on the No Kill Philosophy

In the last decade and a half, several shelters in numerous communities have comprehensively implemented a bold series of programs and services to reduce birthrates, increase placements, and keep animals with their responsible caretakers. As a result, they are achieving unprecedented results, saving upwards of 95 percent of all impounded animals in open admission animal control facilities. Some of these communities are in urban communities, and others are in rural communities. Some are in very politically liberal communities, and others are in very conservative ones. Some are in municipalities with high per capita incomes, and others are in communities known for high rates of poverty. These communities share very little demographically. What they do share is leadership at their shelters who have comprehensively implemented a key series of programs and services, collectively referred to as the “No Kill Equation.”

The fundamental lesson from the experiences of these communities is that the choices made by shelter managers are the most significant variables in whether animals live or die. Several communities are more than doubling adoptions and cutting killing by as much as 75 percent—and it isn’t taking them five years or more to do it. They are doing it virtually overnight. In Reno, Nevada, local shelters initiated an incredible lifesaving initiative that saw adoptions increase as much as 80 percent and deaths decline by 51 percent in one year, despite taking in a combined 16,000 dogs and cats.

In addition to the speed with which it was attained, what also makes Reno’s success so impressive is that the community takes in over two times the number of animals per capita than the U.S. national average and as much as five times the rate of neighboring communities and major U.S. cities. In 2010, 91 percent of dogs and cats were saved, despite an economic and foreclosure crisis that has gripped the region. They are proving that communities can quickly save the vast majority of animals once they commit to do so, even in the face of public irresponsibility or economic crisis. This is consistent with the results in Charlottesville (VA), Tompkins County (NY), and others.

Unfortunately, many shelter directors remain steadfast in their refusal to embrace the No Kill paradigm. Among the various excuses for why it cannot be done, the three most common are that there are simply too many animals for the available homes (“pet overpopulation”), that shelters are not given adequate funding by local governments to get the job done without killing, and that the No Kill philosophy is inconsistent with their public safety obligations.

In the United States, however, careful review of the data, as well as the experiences of the most innovative, progressive, and best performing shelters nationwide, prove that our movement

needs to re-evaluate both the notion as to “who is to blame” as well as “what shelters can do about it.” To put it bluntly, in the United States, shelters have the ability to save animals who are not irremediably suffering, hopelessly ill, or truly vicious dogs (which, combined, apprise less than ten percent of all impounds), and they can do so very quickly. And the two most often cited reasons—pet overpopulation and lack of resources—have not shown to be true barriers to success.

To begin with, many of the programs identified as key components of saving lives are more cost-effective than impounding, warehousing, and then killing animals. Some rely on private philanthropy, as in the use of rescue groups, which shifts costs of care from public taxpayers to private individuals and groups. Others, such as the use of volunteers, augment paid human resources. Still others, such as adoptions, bring in revenue. And, finally, some, such as neutering rather than killing feral cats, are simply less expensive, with exponential savings in terms of reducing births.

In addition, a 2009 multi-state study found no correlation between per capita funding for animal control and save rates. One shelter saved 90 percent of the animals. Another saved only 40 percent. One community has seen killing rates increase over 30 percent. Another has caused death rates to drop by 50 percent. There was, however, no correlation between success/failure and per capita spending on animal control. In other words, the difference between those shelters that succeeded and those that failed was not the size of the budget, but the programmatic effort of its leadership.

In other words, the amount of per capita spending did not seem to make a difference. What did make a difference was leadership: the commitment of shelter managers to implement a key series of necessary programs.

The second reason often cited for failure to embrace and/or achieve No Kill is the idea of pet overpopulation, but the data here has also not borne out the claim. It is important to note that the argument that there are enough homes for shelter animals does not also include any claims that some people aren't irresponsible with animals. It doesn't mean it wouldn't be better if there were fewer of them being impounded. Nor does it mean that shelters don't have institutional obstacles to success. But it does mean that these problems are not insurmountable. And it does mean shelters can do something other than killing for the vast majority of animals.

In the United States, current estimates from a wide range of groups indicate that approximately four million dogs and cats are killed in shelters every year. Of these, given data on the incidence of aggression in dogs (based on dog bite extrapolation) and save rates at the best performing shelters in the country from diverse regions and demographics, better than 90 percent of all shelter animals are “savable.” The remainder consists of hopelessly ill or injured animals and vicious dogs whose prognosis for rehabilitation is poor or grave. That would put the number of savable dogs and cats at roughly 3.6 million.

These same demographics also tell us that every year, roughly 23 million Americans are considering bringing a new dog or cat into their home, and 17 million of those households have not decided where they will get that animal and can be influenced to adopt from a shelter. Even if the vast majority of those 17 million (upwards of 80 percent) got a dog or cat from somewhere other than a shelter, U.S. shelters could still zero out the deaths of savable animals. On top of

that, not all animals entering shelters need adoption: Some will be lost strays who will be reclaimed by their family (shelters which are comprehensive in their lost pet reclaim efforts, for example, have demonstrated that as many as two-thirds of stray dogs can be reunited with their families). Others are unsocialized feral cats who need neuter and release. Some will be vicious dogs or are irremediably suffering and will be killed. In the end, a shelter only needs to find new homes for roughly half of all incoming animals.

From the perspective of achievability, therefore, the prognosis for widespread No Kill success is very good. But let's put all this aside. Let's assume "pet overpopulation" is real and insurmountable. To do that, we have to ignore the data. We also have to ignore the experiences of successful communities. In the United States, to accept the "No Kill is impossible" argument requires pretending the knowledge and the results do not exist.¹

How does this change our support for the No Kill philosophy and the programs and services that make it possible? Even if "pet overpopulation" were true, it doesn't change the calculus. In the United States, shelters nationally are killing roughly half or more of all incoming animals. To borrow an overused sports analogy: that puts the save rate at the 50-yard line. And although the evidence is overwhelming to the contrary, let's say that shelters can never cross the 90% save-rate goal line because of "pet overpopulation." What is wrong with moving the ball forward? If all shelters put in place the programs and services that brought rates of shelter killing to all-time lows in communities throughout the United States, they can save millions of additional lives nationally, regardless of whether they ever achieve an entirely No Kill community. That is worth doing and worth doing without delay. Because every year they delay, indeed every day they delay, the body count increases.

And finally, a No Kill community is one where no savable animals are killed. Unfortunately, there are some animals who are hopelessly ill or injured, irremediably suffering, or in the case of dogs, vicious with a poor prognosis for rehabilitation. These animals are not adoption candidates and sadly, at this time in history, they are often killed, unless hospice care and sanctuaries are available. But since the No Kill philosophy does not mandate that vicious dogs or irremediably sick animals be made available for adoption, it is wholly consistent with public health and safety.

In fact, today, No Kill is a humane, sustainable, cost-effective model that works hand in hand with public health and safety, while fulfilling a fiscal responsibility to taxpayers. The success of this approach across the country proves the viability of the No Kill model and the above principles.

The No Kill Equation

Two decades ago, the concept of a No Kill community was little more than a dream. Today, it is a reality in many cities and counties nationwide and the numbers continue to grow. And the first step is a decision, a commitment to reject kill-oriented ways of doing business. No Kill starts as an act of will.

¹ There are communities which have achieved No Kill. Saying that No Kill is not possible, therefore, flies in the face of its achievement in communities across the United States.

Following a commitment to No Kill is the need for accountability. Accountability requires clear definitions, a lifesaving plan, and protocols and procedures oriented toward preserving life. But accountability also allows, indeed requires, flexibility. Too many shelters lose sight of this principle, staying rigid with shelter protocols, believing these are engraved in stone. They are not. Protocols are important because they ensure accountability from staff. But inflexible protocols can have the opposite effect: stifling innovation, causing lives to be needlessly lost, and allowing shelter employees who fail to save lives to hide behind a paper trail.

The decision to end an animal's life is extremely serious, and should always be treated as such. No matter how many animals a shelter kills, each and every animal is an individual, and each deserves individual consideration.

And finally, to meet the challenge that No Kill entails, shelter leadership needs to get the community excited, to energize people for the task at hand. By working with people, implementing lifesaving programs, and treating each life as precious, a shelter can transform a community.

The mandatory programs and services include:

I. Feral Cat TNR Program

Trap-Neuter-Release (TNR) programs allow shelters to reduce death rates.

II. High-Volume, Low-Cost Spay/Neuter

No- and low-cost, high-volume spay/neuter reduces the number of animals entering the shelter system, allowing more resources to be allocated toward saving lives.

III. Rescue Groups

An adoption or transfer to a rescue group frees up scarce cage and kennel space, reduces expenses for feeding, cleaning, and killing, and improves a community's rate of lifesaving. Because millions of dogs and cats are killed in shelters annually, rare is the circumstance in which a rescue group should be denied an animal.

IV. Foster Care

Volunteer foster care is a low-cost, and often no-cost way of increasing a shelter's capacity, caring for sick and injured or behaviorally challenged animals, and thus saving more lives.

V. Comprehensive Adoption Programs

Adoptions are vital to an agency's lifesaving mission. The quantity and quality of shelter adoptions is in shelter management's hands, making lifesaving a direct function of shelter policies and practice. If shelters better promoted their animals and had adoption programs responsive to community needs, including public access hours for working people, offsite adoptions, adoption incentives, and effective marketing, they could increase the number of homes available and replace killing with adoptions. Contrary to conventional wisdom, shelters can adopt their way out of killing.

VI. Pet Retention

While some surrenders of animals to shelters are unavoidable, others can be prevented—but only if shelters work with people to help them solve their problems. Saving animals requires

shelters to develop innovative strategies for keeping people and their companion animals together. And the more a community sees its shelters as a place to turn for advice and assistance, the easier this job will be.

VII. Medical and Behavior Programs

To meet its commitment to a lifesaving guarantee for all savable animals, shelters need to keep animals happy and healthy and keep animals moving efficiently through the system. To do this, shelters must put in place comprehensive vaccination, handling, cleaning, socialization, and care policies before animals get sick and rehabilitative efforts for those who come in sick, injured, unweaned, or traumatized.

VIII. Public Relations/Community Involvement

Increasing adoptions, maximizing donations, recruiting volunteers and partnering with community agencies comes down to increasing the shelter's public exposure. And that means consistent marketing and public relations. Public relations and marketing are the foundation of a shelter's activities and success.

IX. Volunteers

Volunteers are a dedicated "army of compassion" and the backbone of a successful No Kill effort. There is never enough staff, never enough dollars to hire more staff, and always more needs than paid human resources. That is where volunteers make the difference between success and failure and, for the animals, life and death.

X. Proactive Redemptions

One of the most overlooked areas for reducing killing in animal control shelters are lost animal reclaims. Shifting from a passive to a more proactive approach has allowed shelters to return a large percentage of lost animals to their families.

XI. A Compassionate Director

The final element of the No Kill Equation is the most important of all, without which all other elements are thwarted—a hard working, compassionate animal control or shelter director not content to continue killing, while regurgitating tired clichés about "public irresponsibility" or hiding behind the myth of "too many animals, not enough homes."

No Kill is simply not achievable without rigorous implementation of these programs. They provide the *only* model that ever created No Kill communities. It is up to us in the humane movement to demand them of our local shelters, and no longer to settle for the excuses that shelters often put up in order to avoid implementing them.



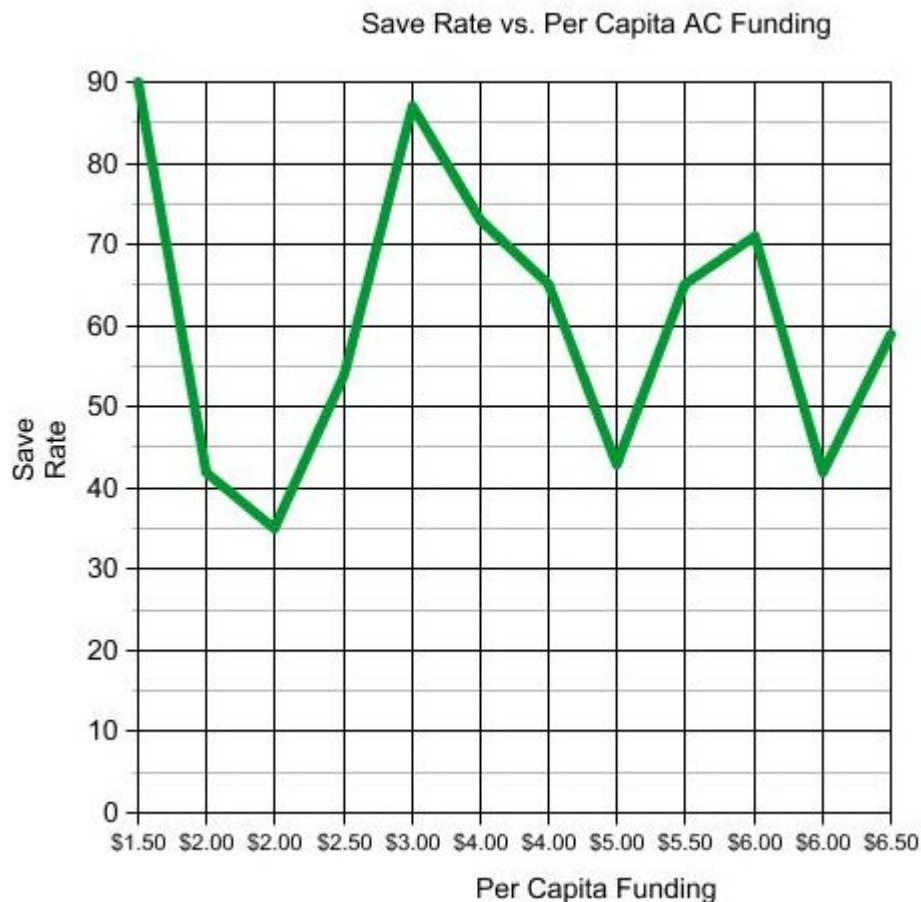
The Cost of Saving Lives

June 2009

A survey of animal shelter funding and save rates conducted by the No Kill Advocacy Center finds that if communities want lifesaving success, they should invest in leadership.

One shelter saved 90% of the animals. Another saved only 40%. One community has seen killing rates increase nearly 30%. Another has caused death rates to drop over 50%. There was, however, no correlation between success/failure and per capita spending on animal control. In other words, the difference between those shelters which succeeded and those which failed was not the size of the budget, but the commitment of its leadership.

Roughly, per capita funding ranged from about \$1.50 to about \$6.30. Save rates ranged from 35% (\$2.00 per capita) to 90% (\$1.50 per capita), but they did not follow any predictable pattern. There were shelters with an 87% rate of lifesaving spending only \$2.80 per capita, and shelters with a 42% rate (less than half of the former) spending more than double that (at \$5.80 per capita):



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In other words, the amount of per capita spending did not seem to make a difference. What did make a difference was leadership: the commitment of shelter managers to saving lives.

While communities should provide adequate funding, only throwing money at the problem will do very little without leadership committed both to lifesaving and to accountability. In King County, WA, the City Council has spent millions of additional dollars since three independent evaluations in 2007 and 2008 revealed high rates of illness, deplorable conditions, cruelty and uncaring at King County Animal Care & Control (KCACC). In fact, until recently, the King County Council has never denied a funding request for KCACC. But no improvement in animal care has been made despite the allocation of millions of additional dollars. Animals continue to languish, continue to get sick because of poor care, continue to go untreated, continue to suffer, and continue to die.

In Portland, OR, likewise:

Over the course of the past few years (fiscal years 2003 through 2008), a period during which the total number of animals brought into the shelter increased by only 5 percent and the agency's budget increased by 50 percent (to a current \$4.6 million), nearly every measure of the agency's performance documents failure. Adoptions are down by 40 percent (dogs) and 18 percent (cats). Nearly half of the dogs not returned to owners are killed; so too are nearly two-thirds of cats. The "kill rate" is now well above rates in neighboring counties facing far more severe budget limitations. Thousands of dollars are squandered on adversarial enforcement efforts that have achieved no meaningful improvement in the public's safety. The number of animals saved by cooperating life-saving organizations and individuals, a number widely recognized as a key measure of community support, has dropped by 40 percent.

That doesn't mean that governments should continue underfunding their shelters. Shelters with low per capita spending claimed difficulty sustaining programs. As a result, the study should not be used as an excuse to reduce shelter budgets.

It does mean, however, that to really make an impact, communities must also invest in progressive leaders willing to embrace the programs and services which make No Kill possible. In the final analysis, the most important element of the No Kill Equation (www.nokilladvocacycenter.org/nokillequation.html) is:

A hard working, compassionate animal control director who is not content to continue killing by hiding behind the myth of "too many animals, not enough homes" or regurgitating tired clichés about public irresponsibility.

Some additional findings of the study included:

Finding: Governments which run their own pounds pay more than if they contract out to private shelters.

Conclusion: Private SPCAs and humane societies have been subsidizing animal control for so long that it has become the unfair and unreasonable expectation of municipalities that these private non-profits should continue to do so. Assuming that the agencies will retain these contracts despite compensation levels that fail to cover the actual costs of running animal control, and regardless of whether they are No Kill or killing shelters, governments are, in effect, having shelters use private donations to subsidize a government mandate. As a result, these shelters are using money raised for adoptions, medical care, and other lifesaving work to pay the cost of sheltering and killing stray and seized animals under their animal control obligations. Donor funding may also be used to enforce often arcane and inhumane animal laws (e.g., breed bans, cat leash laws, feeding bans, pet limit laws) which are inconsistent with lifesaving.

Finding: Government-run or municipal animal control shelters had higher rates of lifesaving than private non-profit shelters administering animal control contracts, but this was not dependent on funding levels.

Conclusion: One possibility is that if a community has both an animal control shelter and a distinct private shelter, the private shelter can maximize its donations to increase spay/neuter, adoptions, and other programs rather than subsidizing animal control leading to improved lifesaving rates. In addition, with two shelters working in a community, there are greater resources available for the animals (including cage/kennel space). But this requires further analysis. It is not clear that each of these communities also had a private humane society, had a private humane society which worked with them, and/or had a private humane society which actually cared about saving lives.

Please note: The findings are preliminary and still being analyzed.



Ten Steps to Adopting Your Way Out of Killing



You can't adopt your way out of killing. It is one of the most enduring dogmas in the animal shelter field. But it could not be more wrong. You actually *can* adopt your way out of killing. The data proves it. Experience proves it. And that is good news for animals and animal lovers.

The Data

Roughly 8 million animals enter shelters every year. Can we find homes for that many shelter animals? The good news is that we don't have to. Some animals need adoption, but others do not. Some animals, like unsocialized cats, need neuter and release. Others will be reclaimed by their families. Some animals will go to rescue groups. Others are irremediably suffering or hopelessly ill. And many more can be kept out of the shelter through a comprehensive pet retention effort. While about four million dogs and cats will be killed in pounds and shelters this year, roughly three million will be killed *for lack of a new home*. Can we find homes for those animals? Yes we can.

Using the most successful adoption communities as a benchmark and adjusting for population, U.S. shelters combined should be adopting almost nine million animals a year. That is almost three times the number being killed for lack of a home. In fact, it is more than *total impounds*, and of those, almost half do not need a new home. But the news gets even better. There are almost two times that many potential adopters each year.

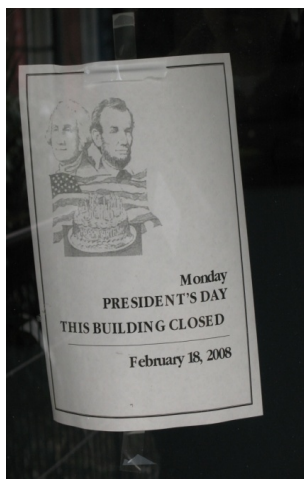
There are over 23 million people who are going to get an animal next year. Some are already committed to adopting from a shelter. Some are already committed to getting one from a breeder or other commercial source. But 17 million have not decided where that animal will come from and research shows they can be influenced to adopt from a shelter. That's 17 million people vying for roughly 3 million animals. So even if 80% of those people got their animal from somewhere other than a shelter, we could still zero out the killing. And many communities are proving it.

The Experience

There are communities with extremely high per capita intake rates who have done it. There are now No Kill communities across the U.S. and abroad: in New York and in California, in Colorado and Virginia, in Utah, Indiana, Kansas, and Kentucky, in Nevada, and across the globe. Washoe County, Nevada, for example, has been very hard hit by the economic downturn. Loss of jobs and loss of homes are at all-time highs. In fact, the state of Nevada has the highest unemployment rate in the nation. As a result, the two major shelters (Washoe County Regional Animal Services and the Nevada Humane Society) together take in four times the per capita rate of Los Angeles, five times the rate of San Francisco, seven times the rate of New York City, and over two times the national average. If there was ever a community which could not adopt its way out of killing, it is Washoe County. But they are doing just that.

And it didn't take them five years to do it. All these communities did it virtually overnight, *by adopting their way out of killing*. Of course, that doesn't mean that the other programs and services of the No Kill Equation aren't crucial. They are. Some, like foster care, keep animals alive long enough to be adopted because, quite simply, some animals are not ready for adoption when they first arrive at the shelter. But, in the end, all these animals found loving homes.

The Excuses



High-kill, low-adoption shelters like to peddle the fiction that increasing the *quantity* of adoptions results in the lowering of the *quality* of adoptions. They do this to deflect criticism by painting the alternative as darker. But increasing adoptions means public access adoption hours when working people and families with children (two important adopter demographics) can visit the shelter. It means greater visibility in the community, working with rescue groups, competing with pet stores and puppy mills, marketing, offsite adoptions, special events, adoption incentives, foster care, alternative placements, a fun and friendly shelter environment, setting and meeting goals, and a good public image. It has nothing to do with reducing quality.

Some shelters, for example, are open for adoption Monday through Friday, 9 am to 5 pm, when many people cannot visit the shelter. To adopt more, shelters need to be open when the kids are home, families are together, and working people can get to the shelter. That doesn't always have to

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February 16 - 24
All adult dogs: \$40
All adult cats: \$25
(6 months and older)
Veterans & active duty
military families adopt
for free!

Monday-Friday:
11am - 6:30pm
Saturday: 10am - 6:30pm
Sunday: 10am - 4:30pm

mean *more* hours, just *different* ones. Moreover, holidays are when families and working people can come to the shelter and when promotions and media outreach can have great impact. When shelters are closed on holidays, they are still staffed, they still take in stray animals, and they are still required to care, feed, and medicate animals. Days closed are just days of lost adoptions. Last year, an animal control shelter in Indiana stayed open for the first time on the 4th of July and did a big promotion, finding homes for 153 animals in a single day—animals who would have been killed in years past. It was, and remains, the single best adoption day for any shelter in Indiana ever. So how does a shelter adopt its way out of killing? There are ten steps to success.

The Steps to Success

1. Get the Right People on Board



People are the heart and soul of any organization, so staff members who are committed to the organization's mission and goals, share lifesaving values, and have a strong work ethic are crucial. Just because someone works at a shelter, humane society, or SPCA does not mean they care about animals and it does not mean they will leave no stone unturned to save a life. For many staff members, working at a shelter is a *job*, not a *mission*. And given the built in excuse of pet overpopulation and public

irresponsibility, they've never been held accountable to their performance or results. Consequently, there is an epidemic of uncaring and underperformance in our nation's pounds and shelters.

To save lives, a shelter must be staffed by people who not only like animals, but like other people as well. That may mean termination of employment for some. Admittedly, this is no fun for anyone involved, but it may prove a necessary step to move forward effectively in many communities. It is always better to fire a bad staff member than kill a good animal. On the plus side, it means the shelter gets to reward the hard workers. It means new people with a passion for saving lives get hired. It means the job just got a whole lot easier because when a shelter has the right people on the team with a good attitude and a strong work ethic, a lot of things fall into place right away.

Tompkins County, New York had 50% turnover in the first six months of its No Kill initiative. The result: a 93% save rate (75% decline in killing). In Reno, only three of the original pre-No Kill 60 staff members remain. The result? A 91% communitywide save rate. Two communities in Delaware saw a 70% decline in killing following an 80% turnover in staff at the shelter. In fact, we are not aware of any shelter/pound going from a culture of killing to a culture of lifesaving without turnover in management and staff.



The more caring shelter staff are; the more educated they are; the more patient they are; the more helpful they are; the more creative they are; the more people will see the shelter as a resource—a resource to find lost pets, a resource to solve problems, a place to donate to, and more importantly, a place to adopt out animals.

2. Keep Them Out of the Shelter



The job is easier if there are less animals coming in, especially animals with “behavior” issues and other impediments to immediate adoption. It is also easier if recently adopted animals are checked up on to make sure adjustment issues or little problems do not skyrocket into intractable ones and result in failed adoptions. And, finally, the job is easier if more lost animals are reclaimed by their families.

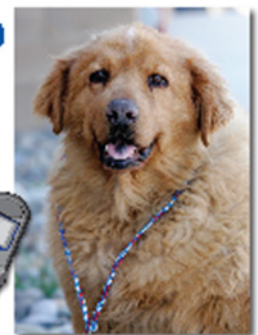
When someone calls to surrender their animal, many shelters fail to give them any more information than how they do so. But more successful shelters know that before a discussion

of the process to surrender is had, they need to discuss *why* the person wants to do so and offer advice to help them keep their companion, if the person inquiring is inclined to do so. A study in the *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association* found that targeted helpful advice that actually solves the problem results in a better than 90% decline in chances of relinquishment. At the Nevada Humane Society, their animal help desk, a central part of their pet retention program, fields over 20,000 calls a year. Of those who agreed to try and resolve their issues after calling to surrender their pet, 59% ended up not doing so.

One of the most overlooked areas for saving lives is getting more lost animals back to their families. Unfortunately, shelters kill unclaimed strays blaming the “irresponsible” or “uncaring” public. In reality, the reasons why reclaim rates are low are more complex and all of them contribute to the number of lost dogs and cats who are never claimed by their families. These include poor ‘lost and found’ matching techniques, filing lost pet reports but not matching them with animals in the shelters, lack of diligence, killing animals too quickly before a match can be made, providing erroneous information about animal behavior, and giving the public a false assurance that once the report of a lost pet is made, the “owner” will be called when the animal is recovered. Beyond scanning animals for microchips, however, most shelters do very little to help people recover their lost pets. Worse yet, most shelter workers and pet owners have absolutely no idea how lost pets behave, the typical distances that they travel, and the best techniques that should be used to recover them, even though shelter staff should know this information and provide it to the public.

**Need Help
With an
Animal?**

**Call us
today!**



- ≡ Moving and cannot take a pet?
- ≡ Behavior issues: cat missing the litter box or dog misbehaving?
- ≡ Outdoor cats in your neighborhood?
- ≡ Need to find a new home for a pet?

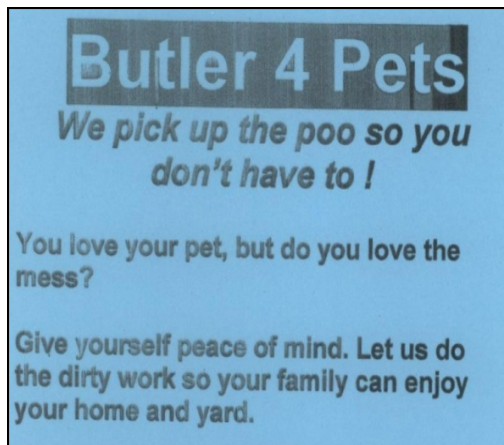
Whatever your situation, we have many resources available to help you.

The result is that people get discouraged. People who are discouraged lose hope. People without hope give up searching. And lost pets are not recovered. It is this broken system that dominates sheltering in the United States today and it is time for a new approach. Washoe County Regional Animal Services has increased their redemption rate for lost dogs to 65% by being proactive, working hard, utilizing technology, and working diligently to get animals home in the field.

Imagine this: If a shelter takes in 10,000 stray dogs, on average 2,000 will be reclaimed. Another 500-700 will be killed (at this time in history) because they are hopelessly ill, irremediably suffering, or truly vicious dogs with a poor prognosis for rehabilitation. That leaves roughly 7,500 dogs competing with “owner-surrendered” dogs for homes.

Now imagine this: If the shelter worked more diligently as they do in Washoe County, they could reclaim 6,500 dogs, leaving only 3,500 dogs. If they then partnered with rescue groups and, on the “owned” animal side, employed a pet retention program, the total number of dogs needing homes would fall to below 1,000, a world of difference.

3. Get By with a Little Help from Your Friends



At the Tompkins County SPCA a few years ago, adopters received a free health examination at any local veterinarian of their choice, free grooming at a local pet salon, a 15% discount at a pet supply store, free behavior advice for life, a free month of someone picking up dog waste in their yard, a free engraved identification tag, a free bag of pet food, a 10% discount at a puppy obedience class, a 10% discount for a pet massage, the “Pet Lover’s Guide to Your New Pet,” a discount at the local coffee shop, and more. These were all donated by local businesses to encourage adoptions and gain customers—a classic “win-win.”

But a shelter’s biggest friends are rescue groups. Shelters are in the business of saving lives and like any business, successful shelters are rewarding their best customers by offering them special deals in return for their loyalty. That means giving something back to rescue groups, who typically save many animals every year. The deal: “any animal, any time.”

4. Set Specific Goals and Celebrate Success

Goals have a way of uniting and inspiring people, so setting a specific adoption goal for each month allows shelters to measure success, plan accordingly, and modify as needed. And every success should be celebrated. According to the Nevada Humane Society, “We ring a bell and everyone pauses to applaud when each adoption is completed. It reminds us all of what we are doing here and it makes the pet adopter feel special.”



5. Make the Shelter Fun and Inviting

Nothing makes a person feel welcome like a smile and hello, but getting people to stay and adopt can only be done by interaction with the animals. In other words, once you get them in the room, the animals do the rest. First, that means the shelter must remain clean. The smell of waste and filthy kennels undermines a smile and “hello” at the door. Shelters should set up play areas for cats, have lots of cat toys, and let people take them out of cages and interact with them. They should set up a doggy pool, have tennis balls and Frisbees, and invite the public to walk dogs and play with them, too. People will stay longer, interact more, and adopt more.



Old-school animal sheltering dogma advises minimizing public contact with animals, but it is human nature to want to make personal contact. Shelters should encourage the public to interact with the animals—to touch, spend time, and fall in love with them. Even if they do not adopt, the animals enjoy the attention. Studies show that the benefit of socialization and contact not only increases adoptions, but also decreases the animals’ stress which makes them more resistant to disease.

6. Go on the Road

Most shelters are located in remote, out of the way parts of the community. In other words, they aren’t located where people work, live, and play. In addition, many people think of shelters as sad and tragic places and may be reluctant to visit. So rather than wait for people to come to the shelter, successful shelters are taking the animals to the people. Over 20 years ago, the San Francisco SPCA created the nation’s first offsite adoption program, setting up adoption locations throughout the city: at shopping malls, in the financial districts, at neighborhood gathering places. During its heyday, roughly one out of four animals were adopted offsite, and over the years, that has meant over 10,000 animals have found a home while being showcased outside of the shelter.

7. Marketing and Promotion

Out of sight is out of mind when it comes to where people get their next companion. In a shelter survey of adopters, 83% said they were influenced to adopt from the shelter by hearing about the organization: reading about them in the newspaper, seeing them at a local community event, finding them online, hearing about them on the radio, or word of mouth. Only 17% said adopting from them was their first choice or something they always knew they would do. To get more adoptions, the shelter must be in the public eye.

A shelter gets the message out on radio and television, in the newspaper, with posters and flyers, by speaking to community groups, and doing offsite adoptions. In one year, the shelter in Tompkins County was mentioned either on the radio, television, or a newspaper 409 times, averaging 37 stories per month, with a public relations budget close to zero.

A colorful poster for "WOOFSTOCK" featuring a cat wearing sunglasses and a lei. The text on the poster includes the event name, dates, and adoption fees.

WOOFSTOCK
Peace Love & Pets
October 8-18

Special Adoption Fees:
Adult* cats: \$10 • Kittens: \$30 • Adult* dogs: \$40
*4 months and older, excludes specially priced dogs



Have fun, be creative, and the community will do the rest. And just as importantly in this day and age, *go viral*. Today, having a website is an indispensable part of any organization. But in sheltering, it isn't enough to save all the lives at risk. Seven out of ten internet users on social marketing websites like Facebook and Twitter. And if a shelter is not utilizing those social networks, it is missing out

on an important market share for promoting their animals. According to Animal Ark shelter in Minnesota, a pioneer in this field, "The sharing of adoptable animals via social networking sites is viral marketing in its truest, purest and best form. It costs virtually nothing to get started, and the payoffs are tremendous: more and quicker adoptions, donations, and other support." But all the animals should have *names and photographs* to get the benefits of increased adoptions.

	Ao882408	Domestic Short Hair Adult, F
	CAT	Domestic Short Hair Young, M
	CAT	Domestic Short Hair Young, F
	6 KITTENS	Domestic Short Hair Young, M

8. Not All Photographs and Descriptions are Created Equal

According to shelter directors who have tops-in-the-nation rates of lifesaving, there is no doubt that a good photograph that *shows off the animal's best qualities* advertised in a newspaper, a pet of the week ad, a flyer, or online will get people to the shelter to meet him or her. But it is the story that will close the deal. Rather than focusing on the basics: name, breed, age, and gender, the most successful shelters tell something about each animal: what they like, their favorite activities and treats, and even a little about their ideal home. In fact, PetRescue, an online adoption gateway in Australia, doesn't allow people to search by breed. Their philosophy is that people want to know what the dog is *like*, not what he is *supposed to be like* and they are trying to replicate the experience of going to a shelter and looking at all the dogs. And the payoff has been big: 65,000 animals have found a home through them.

Who is more likely to get adopted?



A dog described as a "Pit-mix" in a TX shelter



A dog described as a "Pit-mix" in a NV shelter

9. Be Reasonable

Some shelters think that by charging an arm and a leg, they guarantee good homes. But this is a mistake. A multi-state survey found that even waiving adoption fees did not reduce either the quality of the home, the strength of the bond, or the longevity of the adoption. It did find, however, that it greatly increased the number of adoptions. Why? People have lots of choices on where they can get an animal and price will influence their decision. In addition to the adoption fee, adopters have lots of other expenses such as collars, leashes, toys, and even a trip to the veterinarian.

Moreover, adoption policies should be thoughtful, not based on outdated myths. Before a cat, dog, rabbit, guinea pig, hamster, or other animal is killed while a home is being turned down, shelter managers should honestly ask themselves what they would want if they were the one facing the needle. Some shelter animals already have enough going against them: false perceptions that shelter animals are “damaged goods,” poor shelter location, poor hours, poor customer service, a dirty and dilapidated facility. Shelters should not add unnecessary roadblocks like one rescue group in Pennsylvania which refuses to adopt to “unmarried cohabitating adults.”

Ensuring a good home doesn’t mean arbitrary rules, it doesn’t require that potential adopters be grilled for an hour or to fill out a 10-page application. Americans have lots of choices when it comes to getting a new best friend, and when they make the decision to adopt from a shelter rather than going to more convenient places, like the local pet store, shelters shouldn’t start out with the presumption they can’t be trusted.

Screening may be an important part of the adoption process, but a rigid, bureaucratic undertaking is hardly necessary. By talking to and educating potential adopters rather than interrogating them, shelters can place animals in loving homes, without alienating people or making them feel like criminals.

10. Turn Challenges into Opportunities



At some point, every shelter experiences an extraordinary influx of large numbers of animals. The difference between those shelters who are successful and those who fail are the decisions made by those who run them. A shelter’s options are only limited by imagination.

Imagination allowed a shelter which has a “capacity” of 375 but found itself with 750 animals due to a hoarding bust to empty its shelter without killing.



Imagination allowed an open admission shelter in New Zealand to triple its adoption rate overnight. And it allowed a Nevada shelter to more than double its number of adoptions on a weekend the Roads Department closed the street it was on for repairs. All by being creative, marketing animals, running promotions, and engaging the community.

Creating a Brighter Future

Imagine:

- ✓ Through your pet retention program, you reduce the number of people who surrender their animals after you help solve their problems by 59%.
- ✓ Through your proactive efforts to get strays home, you triple the percentage of dogs and increase seven-fold the percentage of cats being reclaimed by their families.
- ✓ Through your TNR program, many feral cats don't come into the shelter. Through your barn cat program, when they do, they go into barn homes.
- ✓ Through your low cost spay/neuter program, almost 70% of people with unsterilized animals get their animals altered.
- ✓ Through your partnerships with rescue organizations, your volunteer foster parents, and medical and behavior rehabilitation programs, animals are moving expeditiously through the system and into the care of the community.

And then, you turbocharge your adoption program. What would be the result? For the animals who remained in your shelter, you will have adopted your way out of killing.

You will have achieved a No Kill community.



October 2010

Visit www.nokilladvocacycenter.org/reforming-animal-control.html to help end the killing in your community



Standing Tall in Washoe County

October 12th, 2010 12:59 pm PT

By **Nathan Winograd**, SF Animal Shelters Examiner

Washoe County Regional Animal Services is responsible for running the municipal shelter for all towns and municipalities of Washoe County, Nevada including Reno. As a tourism-based economy, Reno and its surrounding communities have been very hard hit by the economic downturn. Loss of jobs and loss of homes are at all-time highs. In fact, the state of Nevada has the highest unemployment rate in the nation. As a result, WCRAS takes in four times the per capita intake rate of Los Angeles, five times the rate of San Francisco, seven times the rate of New York City, and over two times the national average.



If there was ever an agency which should have a high rate of killing according to traditional sheltering dogma, indeed if there was ever a community where No Kill could not work, it is Washoe County. But it is working. Year-to-date, WCRAS has a stunning 95% rate of lifesaving.

Mitch Schneider, the WCRAS director, is one of the “few and proud” heads of a municipal facility with a better than 90% save rate. He is proud of his staff, proud of his relationship with community groups, and proud of his community. But “few and proud” are not surprising for Schneider, an ex-marine, who likes to remind you that “once a marine, always a marine.”

This past weekend, both Schneider and I were presenting at the Building a No Kill South Florida conference put on by No Kill Nation. I caught up with him in Ft. Lauderdale and sat down to talk to him about his conversion from skeptic to No Kill advocate.

What was Washoe County like when you first started?

We euthanized [killed] thousands of animals each year. In fact, we had two full-time staff members doing that most of the day. That meant a freezer full of dead pets—fifteen barrels full. Every day, a renderer came to empty the freezer, and every day we filled it up again. As terrible as that was for the animals, it was also very hard on the staff. We had tremendous staff burnout.

When the Nevada Humane Society Board of Directors first brought me in as a consultant, and
[examiner.com/.../standing-tall-washoe-...](#)

before we recruited Bonney Brown to run the shelter, you and I had a conversation where I told you that the Nevada Humane Society wanted to make Washoe County a No Kill community. What did you think?

I didn't believe it could work, at least not in Reno. I did the math and remember thinking that maybe it would work in a more affluent community but we had a more transient population and a high intake rate.

I remember your skepticism well, but I also remember you said "if you think there is a better way of doing things than we are doing in Washoe County, I am willing to consider it." Why were you willing to try something new when you didn't believe it was possible?

No matter what any of us believes, we ultimately won't know if we don't try. On top of that, if in fact No Kill failed, I didn't want it to be because our agency refused to think outside the box or because I didn't like the term. Even if we didn't achieve the ultimate goal, I knew it could still be better than now. We could save more animals. And that would make thousands of animals pretty happy, and it would make thousands of animal lovers pretty happy. It would also make the taxpayers happier. It would reduce staff burnout and turnover, which would reduce costs for human resources for hiring and training new staff, and it would increase our image in the community.

Were you open to all the changes after making the decision to at least give it a try?

I've always been committed to process improvement, but I've been in this business for 20 years and I found myself having to check my traditional thinking and responses a lot. But I also knew that many people go their whole lives never making a difference, but we can, if we choose too. And I wanted to make a difference in the lives of animals, a difference in the lives of people who care about them, a difference in how our community sees itself.

I love Washoe County and if we could achieve No Kill here, it could become a source of collective pride. So while I might dislike the term No Kill, I hate the term dog catcher even more and you are what you act like. Act like a dog catcher, then you are a dog catcher.

Given the high rate of intakes, conventional wisdom would say people in Washoe County are especially irresponsible and that should also translate into a low percentage of lost animals being reclaimed by their families. But you reclaim about 65% of dogs, three times the national average. You also reclaim about seven times the national average for cats. How did you make that happen and prove conventional wisdom wrong?

Some animal control agencies will pick up a stray dog and even if they pick up the dog in front of the dog's home and they know it, they'll still take the dog to the shelter. That's how a dog catcher acts. But we stopped doing that. If we know where that dog lives, we'll drive the dog home. It's good business practice, it is good public relations, and it is the right thing to do.

By returning the dog home, we don't stress the dog, we don't stress the dog's owner, we don't stress the staff at the shelter, and we don't stress the other dogs in the shelter. Everyone wins. Even the taxpayers win: we spend less of their money. It may be a little more work in the field, scanning for microchips, calling the number on tags, knocking on doors in the neighborhood to see if anyone knows where the dog lives,

but it reduces a lot of work back at the shelter. Plus it makes two parties very, very happy: the dog and the person that dog belongs to.

Some animal control agencies think they have to punish people whose dogs are found at large. Why do you not share that view?

We have a public safety mandate and we would never do anything to compromise that, but that doesn't mean we abandon common sense or compassion. Accidents happen, so we treat the dogs and their owners the way we would want our pets and ourselves to be treated. If the person is truly irresponsible, we're going to issue citations, but we aren't going to threaten to kill their dogs or make it more likely that their dogs will be killed. If the dog is not dangerous, you don't have to do that to protect public safety.

What do you have to say to other animal control directors who refuse to embrace this kind of innovation?

When I hear people in other communities refuse to embrace change because they say "We've always done it this way," I can't help but be disappointed. That doesn't justify anything. If you aren't saving animals doing things a certain way, if you have a poor public image doing things a certain way, if you are wasting taxpayer money doing things a certain way, it means it is time to embrace change. Most resistance to change is just laziness. People want to go through the motions without having to really think about why and what they are doing and how to make it better.

What are some of the changes that have helped increase the save rate at WCRAS?

As I said, we work very hard to return animals to their owners in the field. One day one of my officers said to me, "I had a good day today, I impounded six dogs." And I said to her, "How is that a good day for the dogs and the dog's owners?" And she said, "I took five of the dogs home in the field." I said, "that is a good day." When we actually bring five of six wandering dogs home, rather than bringing them into the shelter, I know we are doing the job entrusted to us by the people of Washoe County. We've also embraced TNR for feral cats, have a great relationship with the Nevada Humane Society, and work with lots of different rescue groups. In other words, we work well with others, even if we aren't in agreement with each other on everything. In some ways, I see part of my job as getting out of the way of people who want to save lives.

How has your staff responded to all the changes and especially to the results?

When I hire someone, I look for the kind of employee that is not averse to continuous process improvement. That is why we have a good team. Our staff morale is high. But we're also people, so we have good days and bad days. And when we change a policy to better serve the people and animals of our community, sometimes one of our staff members may complain that "every day I come in, something's changed." But all I have to remind them is that it takes a desire to be better today than we were yesterday to get them over that hump. Plus, if we do things better, they get lots of positive feedback from the community. People write our officers and thank them for bringing their pet home. How can that not make an officer feel good?

Is there one thing that you would credit with your tremendous lifesaving success?

Our success is a result of a willingness to embrace continuous process improvement, which requires not fearing change. That, in turn, requires understanding that you can't solve the problem with the same thinking that created the problem. You can't get a different outcome if you keep doing the same thing.

Learn more:

[The King of Redemptions](#)

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