

Disruption of Humane Society of New York at Star-studded Adoption Event Goes Viral From [Donny Moss, TheirTurn.net](#) July 2022

Approximately 30 animal advocates disrupted the Humane Society of New York (HSNY) when actress Bernadette Peters brought the shelter's animal trainer onto the stage during Broadway Barks, a star-studded adoption event in NYC's theater district. The trainer, Bill Berloni, has close relationships with many actors and actresses, including Peters, because he provides them with animals for their shows, films and commercials.

During the three months leading up to Broadway Barks, activists sent hand-written letters to Peters, explaining that animals were being warehoused at the prominent shelter and pleading with her to call on HSNY to send the animals to adoption centers that are open or to foster homes. Peters did not acknowledge the letters or social media posts in which she was tagged.

VANITY FAIR

RUFF DAY

Bernadette Peters Shuts Down Protesters at Broadway Barks Adoption Event

The actress's charity event was interrupted by animal rights activists protesting the organization's ties to the Humane Society of New York.

BY EMILY KIRKPATRICK
JULY 10, 2022

The activists were apparently there to dispute Broadway Barks's connection to the Humane Society of New York. There have been a number of recent protests against the Humane Society following accusations that the shelter is "warehousing" animals, or holding them in cages indefinitely while ignoring eligible adoption applications. **PETA** **claims** this is a dangerous practice as it, "compromises animals' safety by leaving them in situations in which they're clearly unwanted." However, in **an interview**, the executive director of the Humane Society of NY, **Sandra DeFeo**, refuted that claim, adding that the no-kill shelter is still actively adopting animals. She said, "I don't know what warehousing means. When you are a no-kill shelter it means you are going to keep those animals until you find the right home. And here, we are very, very dedicated to our animals."

Of the dozens of media outlets that reported on the protest against the Humane Society at Broadway Barks, only Vanity Fair explained why.

In what appeared to be an effort to discredit the activists during the protest, Peters falsely stated twice that HSNY is "open for tours," the implication being that people can visit the shelter and see for themselves that the animals are not being warehoused. Berloni, who works at HSNY, did not correct her, despite the fact that he remained on stage during the disruption.



As activists protest the warehousing of animals at the Humane Society of New York during a star-studded adoption event, actress Bernadette Peters tells audience that “anybody can take a tour of the Humane Society” despite the fact that the building has been closed to the public for 27 months. Pictured to her left is Bill Berloni, the Humane Society of New York’s animal trainer, who supplies Broadway shows with animals.

As anticipated by the protesters, several of the Broadway Barks attendees tore their posters, pushed them out of the audience and asserted that the disruption did nothing to help their cause.

“We were not there to make friends or allies,” said [Bonnie Tischler](#), one of the protesters who served as HSNY’s Adoption Director for 22 years before retiring in 2020. “We were there to sound the alarm about the plight of animals living indefinitely at the Humane Society of New York after being ignored for months by stakeholders in the shelter community, including Bernadette Peters. For over two years, they have prohibited adopters from entering the building to meet the animals, all of whom deserve to find forever, loving homes.”

Reviews about Adoptions at Humane Society of New York

Brenda
Local Guide · 34 reviews · 4 photos
★ ★ ★ ★ ★ 10 months ago

I applied for adoption a Kitty named Rocky, Filled out the adoption papers and I waited and then I made a call and the woman administrator took more information. But after a while never heard from her again. Which I found was rude. So I would say my experience wasn't so great.

3

John P.
Brooklyn, NY
6

8/19/2021

Terrible customer service... the place is in the dark ages around trying to market and promote adoptions! Very sad they do not have a more accessible and welcoming environment as well as a decent website to view animals available.

Matt S.
New York, NY
9

9/20/2021

Why does this place tell people to submit adoption applications if they know in advance that they're not going to contact you? I submitted an adoption application to "Sandra" at HSNY nearly 3 weeks ago, yet I have been ignored despite several follow up calls and emails. I finally got through to Anne Marie, who asked me to whom I sent the application. Their website list only ONE address, so why is she asking me that question? She assured me that Sandra would call me back to follow up on my application, but Sandra never called. I'm sure other people who submitted applications didn't go to the lengths that I went to follow up. They probably just went to another shelter, which is what I ultimately did. I feel badly for the animals who are stuck behind bars because Sandra and Anne Marie can't be bothered with contacting people who want to adopt.

Useful 10 Funny Cool

Photo



jill. Thanks for bringing attention to this. I had adopted from them over a decade ago and when I lost that kitty from cancer, I went back to them to adopt and was so disappointed by their lack of initiative to get animals adopted. They had so many "lifers" who will live their remaining years in a small cage. They need to do better.

3d 2 likes Reply Message

Online reviews and comments posted by people who attempted to rescue animals from the Humane Society of New York

Animal rights activists launched a campaign to help the animals at HSNY in October 2022 when Donny Moss of TheirTurn posted the findings of an investigation he and other advocates conducted that corroborated whistleblower allegations of animal warehousing at the prominent Manhattan shelter. The investigation found that HSNY ignores adoption applications; lists just 14 animals on its website, despite having dozens more; does virtually no adoption promotion on social media; has no Adoption Director; and keeps the building closed to the public under false pretenses. Sandra DeFeo, the Executive Director, claims to refuse entry to outsiders due to COVID. However, a lawyer retained by TheirTurn investigated and has determined that that HSNY cannot reopen because of ongoing violations of the ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) which have never been addressed; HSNY is not wheelchair accessible and has already settled one ADA lawsuit based on this violation. If it reopens, HSNY would subject itself to another ADA lawsuit. Notably, HSNY has not taken any steps to make the shelter accessible.

HUMANE SOCIETY OF NEW YORK: STOP WAREHOUSING ANIMALS

In July 2021, an anonymous whistleblower at the Humane Society of New York (HSNY) reported that the animals in its adoption center were being warehoused with minimal efforts to find them homes. As a result, hardly any adoptions were taking place. The whistleblower



also reported that the building was closed to the public under false pretenses. The Executive Director, Sandra DeFeo, has claimed publicly that the building is closed due to COVID. However, according to the whistleblower and two lawyers, DeFeo cannot re-open the building because of ongoing violations of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). HSNY was sued because of these violations

and settled the case. However, no efforts have been made to bring the building into compliance (for example, it is not wheelchair accessible). If HSNY re-opens the building, then it would be subjected to another ADA lawsuit.

As of July 2022, the building has been closed to the public for 27 months. That is far too long for animals who need homes to not be seen by adopters who would otherwise rescue them. And, because HSNY lists just a small fraction of its animals on its website and does very limited social media, potential adopters don't even know that the animals exist.

According to HSNY's website, the building will be closed to the public for the "foreseeable future." In the absence of pressure from advocates and donors, the warehousing will continue, and many of the cats and dogs who have been living in cages for over two years will be stuck in them indefinitely, perhaps until they die.

We are calling on HSNY to send the adoptable animals to foster homes and/or to shelters that are open to adopters. We are also calling on leaders in NYC's shelter community to demand accountability from HSNY.

To learn more and find out how you can help, please scan the QR code.



During Broadway Barks, activists distributed handouts that provided context for the protest.

In December 2021, activists began sending letters to members of the board of the Humane Society of New York to inform them of their concerns and to ask them to intervene. James Gregorio, a board member who practices law in North Carolina, told Tischler that he would ask Sandra DeFeo for proof of

adoptions. Two weeks later, he resigned from the board without providing the documentation he promised. A second attorney who received the activists' letters, C. Jones Perry, also resigned.

In April 2022, the activists began protesting at the home of Alexandra Rowley, another board member who also failed to deliver on her promise to provide proof that adoptions "have continued all along" despite the closure of the building to adopters. After two protests, [Rowley also resigned](#) from the board and informed Tischler by text that she was "no longer affiliated with HSNY." The activists have staged three protests at her home since then. According to Tischler, "her decision to resign did nothing to help the animals she left behind and who were warehoused on her watch for two years."

When the protests and the letter writing campaigns failed to have an impact, the activists knew they had to escalate their efforts on behalf of the animals. "We didn't want to disrupt Broadway Barks, but we had to sound the alarm in a venue where the shelter leaders and supporters who had been ignoring us would be forced to listen," said Donny Moss of TheirTurn, an organizer of the protest. "The celebrities, event attendees and those who read about the protests in the media are now aware of and talking about the issue."

COVID-19 Message

As the Covid-19 situation evolves we at the [Humane Society of New York](#) must take important steps to ensure the health of our patients, our staff and the community. We are notifying you that we are significantly restricting access to the hospital as part of our commitment to deliver medical care.

- Our hospital remains open for urgent cases and wellness appointments.
- For safety measures, [no one other than staff is allowed to enter our building](#), and clients must wear face masks. We are taking pets at the front door and speaking to their owners on their phones during the exams.
- We have introduced telemedicine as another choice of service.

[This protocol will continue for the foreseeable future.](#) We apologize for any inconvenience this disaster policy may cause, and we hope you understand we did not make these decisions lightly or without considerable thought. These are difficult but necessary steps intended to keep everyone safe as we manage the Covid-19 crisis. We apologize for any inconvenience this new policy may cause, and we hope you understand we did not make these decisions lightly or without considerable thought. These are difficult but necessary steps intended to keep everyone safe as we manage the Covid-19 crisis.

The Humane Society of New York has been closed to the public for 27 months and under false pretenses. It's not closed because of COVID, as HSNY claims. It is closed due to ADA violations.

For their part, the activists say they will continue to advocate on behalf of the animals with or without the assistance of people who have the power to help.

"While HSNY puts up roadblocks at every turn to prevent people from adopting, the animals continue to languish in cages," said Matthew Schwartz, an organizer of the protest whose own adoption application was ignored by HSNY. "HSNY must send them to foster homes or shelters that are open to adopters. Until it does, the protests will continue."



Animal Rights News @theirturn · Jun 27

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Advocates have been pleading with Humane Society of NY board members to stop warehousing animals and to send the animals to shelters that are open to adopters. Instead of addressing the problem, three of them, including [#AlexandraRowley](#), resigned. [#BroadwayBarks](#) @OfficialBPeters



Sutton Foster and 9 others



Animal rights activists have protested Humane Society of New York Board member Alexandra Rowley over the warehousing of animals

For two years, Humane Society of New York has prohibited adopters from entering the “shelter” to meet the animals.