

# Give me shelter.



**How “Human Animal Support Services”  
Threatens the Lives of Animals**



# What is “Human Animal Support Services”?

**SHEL-TER / noun: a place giving temporary protection from bad weather or danger.**

**H**UMAN Animal Support Services (HASS) is a program that abandons the fundamental purpose of a shelter: to provide a safety net of care for lost, homeless, and unwanted animals. Instead, the community is expected to do the job they pay shelters to do through their tax and donation dollars (hence the term “community sheltering”) or animals are left to suffer whatever fate might befall them.

**HASS doesn't just threaten the lives of animals. It is an existential threat to animal sheltering itself.**

Under HASS, people who find animals are told to either take them into their own homes until their families are located or leave them on the street because “Intakes of healthy strays and owner surrenders doesn't exist anymore,” and there is “No kennel space for rehoming, stray hold or intake.”

According to Austin Pets Alive, the organization behind HASS, the “hope” is that the lost animal “finds its way back home.” But the evidence against this happening is overwhelming and the end result has sometimes proved fatal. As such, HASS doesn't just threaten the lives of animals, it is an existential threat to animal sheltering itself.

# What's wrong with HASS?

- Human Animal Support Services gambles with the welfare of animals, placing the responsibility for animal care on random members of the community, thereby leaving whether they get home and even survive to chance;
- It is illegal in many states. For example, California law, which is typical, mandates, “The taking up and impounding of all dogs which are found running at large...” (Food & Ag. Code § 31105(a).) It does not permit shelters to turn them away;
- It hides poor shelter performance by turning animals away and not recording their subsequent deaths in publicized statistics;
- It lacks evidence and relies on faulty assumptions;
- It fails to meet the public’s expectations for humane animal services, which it is paying for with both taxes and donations;
- It undermines faith in government;
- It calls for reducing already strained shelter budgets;
- It is embraced by regressive shelters with a history of neglect, abuse, and killing;
- It reverses 50 years of progress in lifesaving and reducing the number of stray dogs roaming American cities.

**Under HASS, care for homeless and stray animals is left to chance: people who find animals are told that if they cannot take the animal into their home, they should leave the animal on the street.**



# How & Why HASS Threatens Animals & Undermines Faith in Animal Shelters

**“Community sheltering” is a euphemism for “no sheltering.”**

Microchipped and wearing a little pink harness, Nesa should have had her whole life ahead of her. Had El Paso Animal Services taken her in and scanned her for a microchip after she was found roaming the streets, she would have been reclaimed within 15 minutes. Instead, she was turned away by the municipal shelter; her finder told to release her back on the street. She was subsequently found dead.

Though Nesa died in an El Paso alleyway, her death had its genesis over 500 miles away in the headquarters of Austin Pets Alive (APA). It was there that the leadership of Austin’s sheltering establishment – Austin Pets Alive and Austin Animal Center – and others hatched a plan to abandon the fundamental purpose – indeed the very definition – of a shelter: *to provide a safety net of care for lost, homeless, abandoned, and unwanted animals.*

Care for homeless and stray animals is left to chance: people who find animals are told to take them into their own homes until their families are located or leave them on the street. According to Austin Pets Alive, the “hope” is that the lost animal “finds its way back home.” For Nesa and many others like her, such “hope” proves fatal.



**Nesa before HASS (above) & after (below)**



# HASS lacks evidence and relies on false assumptions.

The Austin Pets Alive assertion that dogs will find their homes without human intervention is based on a study that claims most are located, in some areas, within one mile of their home.\* Accordingly, Austin Pets Alive tells shelter administrators that “if a person who locates an animal is unable to hold on to it until the owner is located, encourage them to leave it where it is in hopes it finds its way back home. Our thinking is most lost animals are within 1,000 yards of their home.” Their thinking is wrong.

First, shelters cannot assume that lost animals are within a thousand yards of their home. The No Kill Advocacy Center analyzed detailed records of lost and found dogs in several communities. The average distance was roughly two miles (1.96 miles), with one shelter’s average being 3.2 miles. This is consistent with the study APA relies on, which found that the average distance was as high as 2.5 miles away in some areas. And while many dogs were within one mile of their home (which is still very far for a dog), others were four to five miles away.

Second, shelters cannot assume that lost animals will find their way home without human intervention. While the study showed where people picked up dogs, it did not reveal where they were going. The No Kill Advocacy Center’s review of reclaim data shows that the longer dogs were missing, the further away from their homes they tended to be found, precisely the opposite of APA assumptions. Moreover, the APA study showed that roughly half and, in the case of dogs without microchips, more than half were not reclaimed; many did not have homes to go back to. Without a shelter to rehome them when not reclaimed, these dogs may stay homeless. Austin Pets Alive admits that,

*There is just an unknown number of animals that are falling through the cracks out there in the community and we just don’t have a really good understanding of how many that is and if it’s a normal number or more. So it would be really great if we could figure that out.*

Aside from admission of ignorance, APA’s belief that there is a “normal” amount of animals falling

## **Roughly half and, in the case of dogs without microchips, more than half were not reclaimed; many did not have homes to go back to.**

through the cracks is an admission of failure. The goal of a shelter is to treat all animals as individuals and protect all animals, not just some of them.

Third, regardless of how far away from home they are, lost animals face risks. There are many factors, for example, that might impact how likely a free-roaming dog is to be struck by a vehicle: time of day and traffic level, whether a dog is roaming in open space or on a busy road, in an urban area or a rural one, or the level of anxiety and fear a dog is exhibiting that might result in poor judgment. These are not necessarily related to how far the dog is from their home or if they even have one. Nonetheless, under HASS, shelters are directed to treat all free-roaming dogs the same and leave them to whatever fate might befall them.\*\*

It is irresponsible to promote a policy that has great potential to harm dogs with no objective evidence that it will help them.

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\* *APA advises shelters to wait until the dogs actually get hit by a car, or suffer some other injury or illness, before finally taking them in, even though it is within the power of shelters to prevent this harm.*

\*\* *The study author claimed “that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.” Austin Pets Alive helped curate the study, and Maddie’s Fund helped pay for it. Both organizations developed HASS and promote it nationally. But even absent actual conflict, the study’s findings do not support APA’s position.*

## HASS fails to meet the public's expectations for humane animal services.

During the pandemic, U.S. animal shelters fell into one of two camps. The first were those that lived up to their mission, stayed open as an essential service (with policies to protect staff and the public), and met their obligations to residents and animals.

The second were those that closed their doors, turned animals away, and abandoned the debt and duties they owed animals and residents. These pounds did less work, cared for fewer animals, and all but ceased their adoption programs, even though it increased animal suffering. As a result, animals were left on the streets, including a blind pregnant cat found by one couple walking in circles: "It was just heartbreaking... They told us to release the cat." Unfortunately, some shelters have made that permanent.

Why? To appear to be doing a better job than they are. Because shelters are turning animals away and published statistics only measure outcomes for animals taken in, they claim higher placement or "save" rates without doing the work necessary to achieve No Kill success in earnest. But the approach proved unpopular with the public, and Austin Pets Alive knew it.



## Imagine it's *your* dog.

Take a moment to find your home on Google maps. Then, using the "measure distance" feature, span a circumference of one mile from your home. This is the distance HASS supporters argue is safe for dogs on the street in the "hope" they find their way back home without help. Depending on the city, a square mile can include up to 400 blocks.

Do you know the people who live around this circumference in every direction your dog might roam? Would the people who live there recognize your dog and know where she lives? How many roads would your dog need to cross to get home?

Assuming your dog continued in any possible direction, what additional threats would she encounter, such as a busy intersection or a freeway onramp?

If your dog found herself this far from home without you, would she be scared or anxious?

Would this lead to poor judgment that might increase the risk of harm, such as crossing busy streets? And would this anxiety increase the longer she was away from home?

What are the chances your lost dog will turn toward home instead of roaming further away?

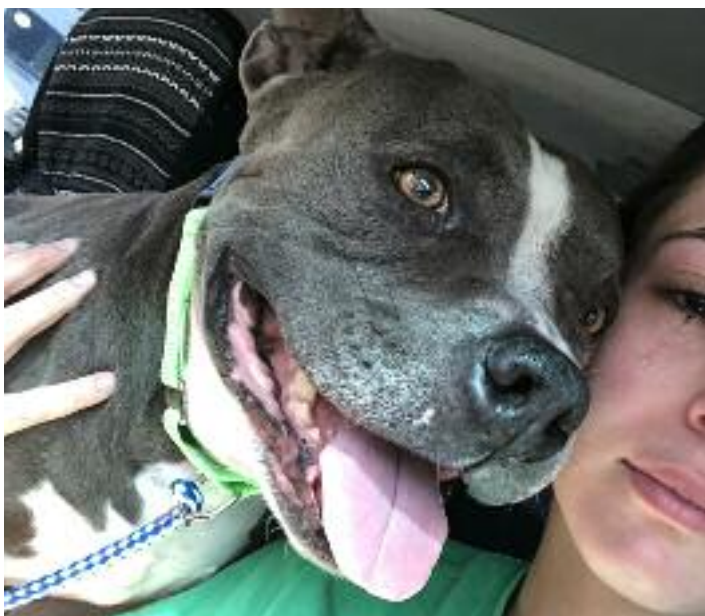
Now imagine that before your dog can get any further away from you, someone finds her and calls the local shelter, only to be instructed that if they can't care for the dog themselves, they should just let her go where they found her in the "hope" she gets home herself, even though your dog may have no idea where home is. And that person, believing that the people at their taxpayer-funded animal shelter must know best, does just that, and the chance to get safely home is lost.

During a strategy session, Austin Pets Alive admitted that “people are already starting to complain about lack of infrastructure to support lost and found and abandoned pets during COVID.” To prevent shelters from providing that infrastructure once the pandemic ended, Austin Pets Alive told partners that they needed to move fast because people’s expectations that shelters would do the job entrusted to them would return once the pandemic ended.

**HASS is illegal in many states. For example, California law, which is typical, mandates, “The taking up and impounding of all dogs which are found running at large...” (Food & Ag. Code § 31105(a).) It does not permit shelters to turn them away.**

**HASS hides poor performance by turning animals away and not counting their subsequent deaths in statistics.**

Following HASS, Austin Animal Center, the city’s shelter, began turning dogs and cats away. Other shelters have, too. When a Good Samaritan found an abandoned dog tied up, she tried to take the dog to Miami-Dade Animal Services (MDAS). MDAS staff told her to “put [him] back where you found it, and hopefully it’ll go back home.” But there was no home to go back to. Leaving him tied up would have meant his starvation. MDAS “confirmed that the shelter has instructed people who find stray animals on the streets to leave them in the area where they discovered them.”



## HASS IN ACTION

A photograph showing a person in a red shirt and a black face mask standing next to a small brown dog. Another person in a black shirt and blue pants is standing to the left. In the foreground, there is a large metal sawhorse. The scene is outdoors on a paved area.

Through tears, the finder said, “How am I going to just put [him] back in the middle of the street? I’m not going to do that.” Had she followed the cruel tenet of the HASS program, he might have shared Nesa’s fate. But that death would have been rendered invisible as dogs like Nesa are not counted in statistics.

Not one of the shelters that has embraced HASS keeps records of the number of animals turned away or how many end up dead after they do so. Many also hide statistics showing HASS results in lower intake rates, higher stray numbers, and higher DOAs (animals found on the street brought to the shelter or sanitation departments “dead on arrival”). Shelter Animals Count, a national shelter data reporting clearing-house hosted by Maddie’s Fund, changed its policies to allow individual shelters to determine what data is publicly available and, consequently, hidden.



## **HASS reverses 50 years of progress in lifesaving and reducing the number of stray dogs roaming American cities.**

HASS redefines failure and animal abandonment as success. It defies the public’s humane expectation that their tax and philanthropically-funded animal shelters have a moral duty to care for the neediest and most vulnerable animal companions. And it reverses 50 years of progress by threatening to return cities to the status quo of the 1970s when loose dogs were a familiar sight.

To overcome public complaints, Austin Pets Alive suggested that municipal governments could enact a “reduction in municipal shelter operating budgets” since shelters would be taking in fewer animals, caring for fewer animals, and not having to find them homes.\*

That Austin Pets Alive would call for less money for animal services in their communities, a lower profile for the agencies that are supposed to care for the most vulnerable of animals, and less innovation instead of more, is not only self-defeating; it represents both a failure of leadership and imagination. And that such a retreat should occur at this moment, when the American public has shown itself more enthusiastic and generous in its embrace of animal welfare than ever before, adds to the tragedy of wasted potential. Just as our fellow Americans are standing up, APA would have our nation’s shelters stand down.

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*\* Like HASS itself, this is a bait-and-switch. None of the shelters that have embraced HASS have reduced budgets accordingly.*



# What kind of shelters embrace HASS?

**S**HELTERS with a history of neglect, abuse, and high rates of killing or those that want to legitimize poor performance and avoid accountability embrace HASS. For example:

- **LOS ANGELES COUNTY'S DEPARTMENT OF ANIMAL CARE & CONTROL** has a history of neglect, illegal killing, allowing animals to starve, and allowing animals to cannibalize one another.
- **SEATTLE HUMANE** RAISED \$30,000,000 for a new shelter by promising donors to increase rescue lifesaving by 60%, but failed to deliver. After building a 57,000-square-foot facility, rescue intakes declined by 64%. They used HASS to justify the failure, claiming "the landscape of animal welfare has changed recently."
- **ROCHESTER ANIMAL SERVICES** not only returns neglected animals to their abusers but also threatens rescuers with retaliation if they criticize shelter practices, including leaving cats and kittens on the street.
- **MEMPHIS ANIMAL SERVICES** has a history of allowing animals to starve and cannibalize one another, retaliating against rescuers who expose inhumane conditions, and violating state and federal law to hide why large numbers of animals are dying in its facility.
- **PHILADELPHIA'S ANIMAL CARE AND CONTROL TEAM** has a history of neglect, filth, illegal killing, and physical abuse (including breaking a dog's jaw).
- **EL PASO ANIMAL SERVICES** has a history of high killing rates, allowing dogs to cannibalize one another, allowing dogs to die of exposure in unheated enclosures, and allowing kittens to die in their kennels. (The El Paso City Council subsequently canceled the program due to citizen complaints about the increasing number of dogs being found dead on city streets.)



*Above: A dog abused and killed by Los Angeles County animal control officers. Under current leadership, the pound has neglected, killed, and starved animals, forcing them to cannibalize others to survive.*



# What should shelters do to lower intakes, increase adoptions, and help get more lost animals back home?

**T**HE programs and services of the No Kill Equation – pet retention, foster care, sterilization, offsite adoptions, proactive redemption, volunteers, behavior and rehabilitation, and related efforts – provide a humane, sustainable, and fiscally-responsible model that is consistent with public health and safety, while fulfilling the public’s expectation of effective and responsive animal services.

Shelters that have comprehensively implemented the programs and services of the No Kill Equation have responsibly reduced intakes, increased adoptions, and helped reunite more lost animals with their families, achieving placement rates greater than 95% and as high as 99% *without turning animals away*. Embrace of the No Kill Equation is responsible for a 90% decline in killing nationwide and has been called “the single biggest success of the modern animal protection movement.” It is also immensely popular with the public: 96% of Americans believe we have a moral duty to care for animals and should have strong laws to do so.

A University of Denver study also found that “The costs associated with implementing the [No Kill Equation] appear to have been more than offset by a series of economic benefits to the community” – a return on investment of 400%. This was “the most conservative possible measure of the data.” In other words, the actual economic benefit is likely to be higher. Likewise, in California, one provision of the No Kill Equation resulted in a nearly 700% increase in lifesaving — from 12,526 animals a year before the law went into effect to 99,783 after. That increase corresponds with an annual cost *savings* of \$3,497,283 for killing and destroying remains (these savings do not include additional savings related to the cost of care). Similar studies conducted in Florida, Michigan, Minnesota, and Oklahoma, reached similar conclusions.



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# I thought Austin Pets Alive championed the No Kill Equation. What happened?

**Implementation of the No Kill Equation in Austin, Texas is how APA came to national prominence, a legacy it now betrays.**

**T**HE direction of Austin Pets Alive of today bears little resemblance to the APA during the fight for a No Kill Austin over a decade ago. Instead, Austin Pets Alive offers harmful advice to shelters, embraces programs that undermine animal protection, partners with regressive directors and organizations to silence the voices of reformers, and engages in efforts to cover up neglect and abuse of animals in shelters. Why this stunning turnaround?

When APA leadership joined the National Animal Control Association board, which represents the directors of kill shelters across the nation, and invited the directors of those shelters to serve on its advisory committees, the personal relationships formed usurped APA's mission and the allegiances of the organization flipped. Austin Pets Alive abandoned the promotion of proven solutions to shelter killing that requires compassion, commitment, and competence with policies that help directors of poorly-run shelters mislead the public they serve.

Moreover, as APA has grown into a \$10 million a year organization, standing up to entrenched interests now represents a threat to the financial bottom line. As social scientists describe it,

*Organizational maintenance is a special form of goal transformation, in which the primary activity of the organization becomes the maintenance of membership, funds, and other requirements of organizational*

*existence. It too is accompanied by conservatism, for the original goals must be accommodated to societal norms in order to avoid conflicts that could threaten the organization's viability.*

Case in point: Citing a fictional “pet shortage,” Austin Pets Alive provided a national platform to those calling for shelters to partner with breeders or to breed puppies to sell themselves, even while many of those are killing rescued animals or, through

HASS, turning them away. An APA director noted that the “pet shortage” was a “real issue” for her “respected colleagues,” and we “should give them the benefit of the doubt,” even though doing so sacrifices the health, welfare, and lives of animals APA was founded to protect.

This disconnect between what animal welfare “professionals” claim to want and what the American public wants — including rescuers,

volunteers, shelter reform advocates, good samaritans who find animals, taxpayers, and constituents — is nothing new. It is the very reason the No Kill movement was founded in the first place: to end complacency with killing and indifference to the needs of animals. That groups like Austin Pets Alive were formed to combat the very complacency they now embrace doesn't mean the fundamental goal of animal sheltering — to provide a life-affirming second chance to animals — has changed, too. It just means that they have.

**Leadership at Austin Pets Alive has abandoned the promotion of proven solutions to shelter killing with policies that help their new colleagues — directors of poorly-run shelters — mislead the public they serve.**



Click on image below to learn about the No Kill Equation.



**Learn more at [nokilladvocacycenter.org](http://nokilladvocacycenter.org)**

