

medical and behavioral rehab + public relations + community involvement
+ rescue groups + TNR
accountability + compassionate care

The No Kill

Two decades ago, the concept of a No Kill community was little more than a dream. Today the humane movement is poised to make it a reality—to meet the challenge of building a truly humane society. And the first step is a decision, a commitment to reject killing as the primary shelter population management tool. No Kill starts as an act of will. The next step involves putting in place the infrastructure to save lives.

Following a commitment to No Kill is the need for accountability. Accountability means having clear definitions, a lifesaving plan, and charting successes and failures. Clear protocols should be established, and staff properly trained to ensure that each and every animal is given a fair evaluation and a chance for placement or treatment. 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 protocols without flexibility 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 an extremely serious one, 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

Many animal control agencies in communities throughout the United States are embracing Trap, Neuter, Return programs (TNR) to improve animal welfare, reduce death rates, and meet obligations to public welfare and neighborhood tranquility demanded by governments. In San Francisco, for example, the program was very successful, resulting in less impounds, less killing and reduced public complaints. In Tompkins County, an agreement with county officials and the rabies control division of the health department provided for TNR as an acceptable complaint, nuisance and rabies abatement procedure. In specific cases, the health department paid the Tompkins County SPCA to perform TNR.

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

Spay/neuter is the cornerstone of a successful lifesaving effort. Low cost, high volume spay/neuter will quickly lead to fewer animals entering the shelter system, allowing more resources to be allocated toward saving lives.

In the 1970s, the City of Los Angeles was the first to provide municipally funded spaying and neutering for low-income pet owners in the United States. A city study found that for every dollar it was investing in the program, Los Angeles taxpayers were saving \$10 in animal control costs due to reductions in animal intakes and fewer field calls. Indeed, Los Angeles shelters were taking in half the number of animals after just the first decade of the program and killing rates in the city dropped to the lowest third per capita in the United States. This result is consistent with results in San Francisco and elsewhere.



Research shows that investment in programs balancing animal “care” and “control” can provide not only immediate public health and public relations benefits but also long-term financial savings to a jurisdiction. According to the International City/County Management Association,

An effective animal control program not only saves cities and counties on present costs—by protecting citizens from dangerous dogs, for example—but also helps reduce the costs of animal control in the future. A city that impounds and euthanizes 4,000 animals in 2001... but does not promote spaying

and neutering will probably still euthanize at least 4,000 animals a year in 2010. A city that... [institutes a subsidized spay/neuter program] will likely euthanize significantly fewer animals in 2010 and save on a host of other animal-related costs as well.

III. Rescue Groups

An adoption or transfer to a rescue group frees up scarce cage and kennel space, reduces expenses for feeding, cleaning, killing and carcass disposal, and improves a community's rate of lifesaving. Getting an animal out of the shelter and into an appropriate placement is important and rescue groups, as a general rule, can screen adopters as well or better than many shelters. In an environment of 5,000,000 dogs and cats killed in shelters annually, there will rarely be a shortage of adoptable animals and if a rescue group is willing to take custody and care of the animal, rare is the circumstance in which they should be denied.

IV. Foster Care

Foster care is crucial to No Kill. Without it, saving lives is compromised. It is a low cost, and often no cost, way of increasing a shelter's capacity, improving public relations, increasing a shelter's public image, rehabilitating sick and injured or behaviorally challenged animals, and saving lives.

At some point in time, nearly every animal shelter feels the pinch of not having enough space. A volunteer foster program can be an ideal low-cost way to greatly increase the number of lives a shelter can save while at the same time providing an opportunity for community members to volunteer. Not only does a foster program maximize the number of animals rescued, it allows an organization to care for animals who would be difficult to care for in a shelter environment—orphaned or feral kittens, sick or injured animals, or dogs needing one-on-one behavior rehabilitation. For animals who may need a break from the shelter environment, foster care provides a comfortable home setting that keeps animals happy and healthy.

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.

As one commentator put it, "if each pet lives 10 years, on average, and the number of homes grows at the same rate that homes are lost through deaths and other attrition, then replacement homes would become available each year for more than twice as many dogs and slightly more cats than enter shelters. Since the inventory of pet-owning homes is growing, not just holding even, adoption could in theory replace all population control killing right now—if the animals and potential adopters were better introduced."

Shelter killing is more a function of shelter practices, than 'public irresponsibility.'

In fact, studies show people get their dogs from shelters only 15% of the time overall, and less than 10% of the time for cats. If shelters better promoted their animals and had adoption programs responsive to the needs of the community, they could increase the number of homes

available and replace population control killing with adoptions. In other words, shelter killing is more a function of market share, than "public irresponsibility." Contrary to conventional wisdom, shelters can adopt their way out of killing.

VI. Pet Retention

While some of the reasons animals are surrendered to shelters are unavoidable, others can be prevented—but only if shelters are willing to work with people to help them solve their problems. Saving all healthy and treatable pets requires communities to develop innovative strategies for keeping people and their companion animals together. And the more a community sees its shelter(s) as a place to turn for advice and assistance, the easier this job will be.

Animal control agencies can maintain “libraries” of pet care and behavior fact sheets in the shelter and on a website. Articles in local papers, radio and television spots all provide opportunities to feature topics like solving litterbox avoidance and excessive barking. Other pet retention programs include free in-home dog behavior problem-solving by volunteers, low-cost dog training, pet friendly rental programs, dog walker referrals, and pet behavior classes.

VII. Medical and Behavior Rehabilitation

A shelter begins helping treatable animals by closely analyzing statistics. How many animals entering a shelter are treatable? What types of injuries and illnesses are most common? The answers to these questions will determine what types of rehabilitation programs are needed and how to effectively allocate resources. For example, one community may have many underage kittens in its shelters. Another may have substantial numbers of cats with upper respiratory infections, or dogs with kennel cough. Yet another may find that a large portion of treatables are dogs with behavior problems. Each will need a different lifesaving program.

These can include creating a fund dedicated solely to medical and behavioral rehabilitation. Such a fund lets the public direct their donations and allows a shelter to demonstrate what they are doing to help treatables. In addition, the shelter can establish relationships to have local veterinarians come to the shelter to do rotations. These veterinarians can supplement the work of a staff veterinarian and veterinary technicians and help diagnose animals, give vaccinations, and administer medication and treatment.

A relationship with a veterinary college can allow veterinary students to volunteer at the shelter on a regular basis, providing the students with real life on-the-job training, while shelter animals receive high-quality care under the direction of the veterinary college faculty. Finally, it is impossible to

overstate the importance of a foster program for underaged kittens and puppies, undersocialized animals, and those recovering from medical treatment.

VIII. Public Relations/Community Involvement

Rebuilding a relationship with the community starts with redefining oneself as a “pet rescue” agency. The community must see improvement at the shelter, and improvements in the area of lifesaving. Public contact with the agency must include good customer service, more adoptions, and tangible commitments to give the shelter the tools it needs to do the job humanely. Public contact, however, is not necessarily a face-to-face encounter. The public has contact with an agency by reading about it in the newspaper, seeing volunteers adopting animals at a local shopping mall, or hearing the Executive Director promoting spay/neuter on the radio. It means public relations and community education.

The importance of good public relations cannot be overstated. Good, consistent public relations are the key to getting more money, more volunteers, more adoptions, and more community goodwill. Indeed, if lifesaving is considered the destination, public relations are the vehicle which will get a shelter there. Without it, the shelter will always be struggling with animals, finances, and community recognition.



Increasing adoptions, maximizing donations, recruiting volunteers and partnering with community agencies comes down to one thing: increasing the shelter's exposure. And that means consistent marketing and public relations. Public relations and marketing are the foundation of all a shelter's activities and their success. To do all these things well, the shelter must be in the public eye.

Indeed, a survey of more than 200 animal control agencies, conducted by a graduate student at the University of Pennsylvania College of Veterinary Medicine, found that "community engagement" was one of the key factors in those agencies who have managed to reduce killing and increase lifesaving. One agency noted that "public buy-in is crucial for long-term improvements" placing primary importance on "the need to view community outreach and public engagement as integral to the agency's overall purpose and programs rather than simply as an add-on accomplished with a few public service announcements..."

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 come in and make the difference between success and failure and, for the animals, life and death.

In San Francisco, a community of approximately 800,000 people, volunteers spend over 110,000 hours at the shelter each year. Assuming the prevailing hourly wage, payroll taxes and benefits, it would cost the San Francisco SPCA over \$1 million dollars annually to provide those services. In Tompkins County, a community of about 100,000 people, volunteers spend over 12,500

hours walking dogs, grooming cats, helping with adoptions, and doing routine but necessary office work, at a cost savings of approximately \$85,000 if the SPCA were to pay for those services at the entry level hourly rate.

The purpose of a volunteer program is to help a shelter help the animals. It is crucial to have procedures and goals in mind as part of the program. In Tompkins County, for example, the agency required all dogs available for adoption to get out of kennel socialization four times per day. This could not be accomplished by staff alone and therefore volunteers were recruited, trained and scheduled for specific shifts that would allow the agency to meet those goals. It became quickly apparent that having volunteers come in whenever they wanted did not serve those goals and so all volunteers were given instructions and a specific schedule.

X. 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 regurgitate tired clichés or hide behind the myth of "too many animals, not enough homes." Unfortunately, this one is also oftentimes the

hardest one to demand and find.

But it clear—as better than a decade of success in San Francisco, Tompkins County, and now elsewhere demonstrates—that No Kill is simply not achievable without rigorous implementation of each and every one of these programs and services. It is up to us in the humane movement to demand them of our local shelters, and no longer to settle for illusory excuses and smokescreens shelters often put up in order to avoid implementing them.

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