

Building a No-Kill Community



TOMPKINS COUNTY
SOCIETY FOR THE PREVENTION OF CRUELTY TO ANIMALS



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Forward: Diary of No-Kill Shelter Director

By Nathan J. Winograd, Executive Director, Tompkins County SPCA
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As I approached the house that was home to Tompkins County's SPCA, I was planning for my first two weeks to be a learning time. I wanted to get to know the staff and see their routine: everything from how they cleaned the kennels and fed the animals to how they tested aggressive dogs, investigated cruelty complaints, and handled animals that were sick. I wanted to know how every little thing ran.

I had my own philosophy and approach of how an animal shelter could work best. But I wanted to give the staff an opportunity to share their own view without being worried that their views would conflict with mine.

The first day went pretty well. I at least got a sense of where everything was. Day Two, my staff informed me that our dog kennels were full and that since a litter of six puppies just came in, I needed to decide who was going to be killed in order to make space. I asked for Plan B. There was none. I asked for suggestions. None of those either. So much for my plan to be the silent observer. It was time for a staff meeting.

I introduced myself formally, told them about my background and experience, and shared my view of what constituted a successful shelter. Success, I said, is defined by how many animals go home alive, period. Of course, we want to make sure they are going into responsible, loving homes—anything less would mean that they would come right back, taking us further away from, not closer to, our goals. But finding homes, I emphasized, was the bottom line. And everyone would be measured by results. The rest would fall into place: community support, new resources, and the programs that follow. To get the results, we needed the desire to succeed, the creativity to

We did it with a simple yet highly effective three-step process:
**1) Stop the killing; 2) Stop the killing;
3) Stop the killing.**

come up with solutions, and the flexibility to implement them.

I got nowhere. "We don't have anywhere to put them." "We don't have any foster parents who would take dogs or puppies." "This is how we have always done it."

Day two and my experiment with trying to build consensus came to an end. It was time to lay out my own policy.

"Volunteers who work with animals do so out of sheer love," I said. "They don't bring home a paycheck. So if a volunteer says 'I can't do it,' I can accept that from them. But staff members are paid to save lives. If a paid member of staff throws up their hands and says, 'There's nothing that can be done,' I may as well eliminate their position and use the money that goes for their salary in a more constructive manner...like hiring temporary boarding space at a kennel. So...what are we going to do with the puppies that doesn't involve killing any animals?"

And a solution was found: horse troughs for puppies in the lobby next to the front desk. What better way to showcase those little gems, while simultaneously giving them much needed socialization that would lead to happy permanent placements?

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The next weekend, 70 kittens were relinquished to the shelter, above and beyond the regular number of incoming dogs, cats, and other assorted animals (including 16 mice left out by our dumpster). As the humane officers informed me that they had just raided a residence and were bringing in 30 sick cats, I overheard one staff member say to another, "Maybe now he will euthanize some animals." Back to square one. I explained that killing for space was no longer an option. Again, appropriate alternatives were found.

Not all staff was supportive of the new order. Over the next five months, seven of the twelve full-time employees on staff moved on, eventually replaced with new coworkers who shared a vision of a no-kill Tompkins County. In the meantime, not a single animal was killed for lack of space.

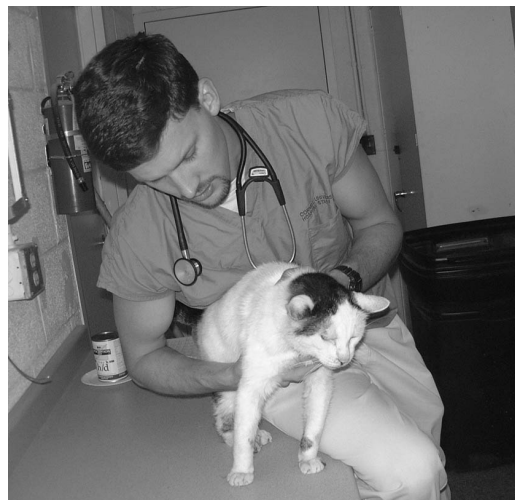
The TC SPCA was set up like hundreds of humane societies throughout the country. It maintains an animal control contract with the city of Ithaca, as well as all ten townships in the county. That means we are required to take in all stray and abandoned animals. The semi-rural/urban county has a population of 100,000 people. The TC SPCA has an annual budget of \$616,000 and takes in approximately 3,000 animals per year.

So how does a traditional shelter make a community no-kill? In Tompkins County, we did it with a simple yet highly effective three-step process: 1) Stop the killing; 2) Stop the killing; 3) Stop the killing. I am not joking. No-kill starts as an act of will.

Like so many shelters with animal control contracts, the TC SPCA had relied on the fiction that the only solution to pet overpopulation is the "blue [euthanizing] solution." Staff would shake

their heads and continue to blame "irresponsible owners" for the fact that so many animals would go out the door in barrels rather than in the loving arms of families. Like so many other shelters, the TC SPCA never once saw the killing as its own failure to find solutions, meet its real mandate to be an animal welfare organization, or live up to the very real but often ignored shelter credo that "every life is precious." But now, a new Board of Directors had decided to make a change.

Over the next six months, we developed a flurry of programs to increase the number of homes, reduce birthrates, rehabilitate injured animals, and keep animals with their loving, responsible caretakers.



Next, I approached every veterinarian in the community and asked "How much will you charge me for spay/neuter and treatments? Will you waive your office fees?"

I went down the list of what I thought we would need. I went to the local universities and asked, "What can you provide? Do you have Ph.D.s who can look at my wacky dogs and tell me how to bring them back to normal behavior?"

We went to the media and said, "Can you showcase our available pets once a week on the local news?"

Forward: Diary of No-Kill Shelter Director

Now, we're on the local t.v. news once a week, we're on the local radio station once a week, and we're in the local newspaper once a week. So at least three times a week, we're out there.

I contacted every church, every community group, and said, "Anytime you have an event, I'd like to be there, and bring some pets who need homes." I didn't get any no's. Everybody said, "That sounds great!" Once we got the ball rolling, the calls started coming in. "I'm opening up a new store. Can you bring some kittens for adoption?"

When I started, the staff didn't really want volunteers around. The then-shelter manager informed me that, "Volunteers are more trouble than they are worth." Once we adopted our new route, we went very quickly from a handful of volunteers to about 140. During the summer, we were, unfortunately, even turning volunteers away. We had our dogs going out for so many walks that they were not in the kennels long enough to be viewed by the public for adoption! I had to limit them to three walks a day. I had to have the dogs in the kennels long enough so when an adopter came to look at them, I didn't have all these empty cages.

I spent my first two months apologizing for the past actions of the organization and for how poorly people were treated. People want to save lives. What they don't want to do is help you kill animals. So it was nice to be asking volunteers to let the dogs just sit in the kennels for a little.

And so we went from excuses to answers, from blaming to solving. And during our peak

summer season, the death rate in Tompkins County plummeted by 78%. We didn't just save cute and cuddly animals, either. We found loving homes for old pets, blind pets, and pets missing limbs. The number of animals sterilized prior to adoption went from 10% to 100%. We went from a handful of foster homes to 196 during our busy summer months.

While all of the healthy, friendly pets were saved, overall almost 9 out of ten dogs and cats impounded by the SPCA were either reclaimed by their owners

or found new homes, one of the best "save rates" of any county in the United States. And the level of community giving skyrocketed.

Next year, Tompkins County will be 100 years old. And next year, we'll be the first traditional shelter that serves as an animal control agency

and assumes the responsibility for every stray animal where no healthy pet, feral cat, or treatable animal is killed. That has been the case since my first day at work, June 11, 2001. And that includes goats, chickens, bunnies, guinea pigs, and other assorted critters too.

We did it not with a big shelter, not with buckets of cash, but with a simple, firm commitment to stop the killing and the flexibility to see it through. It started with six puppies in a horse trough. Today, it involves hundreds of animals in foster care, hundreds more traveling to off-site adoptions, a coalition of breed-specific rescue groups, local veterinary participation, and a community that has faith in its shelter and wants to support our lifesaving results. Is each life precious as every shelter tells us? Only if we believe that at the end of the day, every death of a healthy, treatable sick or injured animal, or feral cat is a profound failure. And only if the shelter director acknowledges that the responsibility for the death is his or hers alone. ■



Redefining a Movement

Some 150 years ago, the pioneers of the humane movement set down the first bricks in a foundation dedicated to building a humane nation. The challenges they faced were different than the ones we face today. But their mission remains our mission, and we strive to carry it out with the same values taught by their example: believe in your dreams, hold on to your principles, and never doubt that through perseverance and hard work you can succeed.

Somewhere along the path, however, the humane movement lost its way. The dream of creating a truly humane society was pushed aside by the day-to-day ordeal of intake and disposition of dogs and cats in shelters across the country. Hope was replaced with despair. And despair turned to anger. The humane movement began to blame the very people we needed to embrace. And animals—the healthy and treatable side-by-side with the hopelessly ill—died in shelters by the millions.

To cope with the death, we built walls to protect us. We assured ourselves that there was no other way. We generated innovative workshops to help shelter employees “cope”

with “euthanasia.” But innovation that would change the status quo got lost in the now-all-too-familiar cliché that there are just “too many animals and not enough homes.”

It is time to recapture our roots.



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*.

The question that stops so many before they even start is *How to begin?* Do you need a large, state-of-the-art shelter? Do you need millions of dollars? They may help, but you don't need them to save lives. The big, beautiful shelter, a large volunteer corps, increased donations and more are all by-products of no-kill success—not their cause. So the first step is a decision, a commitment to reject killing as shelter management tool. No-kill starts as an act of will.

Next comes creating local programs, with a local focus. The community will respond and success will follow. That is what we have done in Tompkins County, New York, and it is what any other community can do. ■

The Framework

Definitions

We categorize animals because we believe it is a necessary prerequisite to creating strategies and allocating resources to save lives—different problems have different solutions, and you can't know what the solutions are unless you know exactly what the problems are. We also believe that if definitions and categories are applied fairly and accurately, a community can better judge whether its shelter is doing a good job.

No-kill: No-kill does not mean that no animals die in the shelter. In our view, a no-kill community is one where all healthy and treatable animals, including feral cats, are saved. We don't use the term "euthanasia" because euphemisms make the task of killing easier.

Healthy: Weaned dogs and cats who at, or subsequent to, the time they are impounded or otherwise taken into possession, have manifested no sign of a behavioral or temperamental defect that could pose a health or safety risk or otherwise make the animal suitable for placement as a pet, and have manifested no sign of disease, injury, congenital or hereditary condition that adversely affects the health of the animal, or that is likely to adversely affect the animal's health in the future.

Treatable: Any animal who is not healthy but who could become healthy with reasonable effort. Whether an animal is "treatable" is determined by balancing four primary factors: 1. diagnosis, 2. prognosis, 3. painful rehabilitation or otherwise suffering, and 4. length of rehabilitation.

We do not believe cost plays any role in the determination of whether an animal is treatable or not—regardless of whether the surgery costs \$100 or \$1,000 dollars or more. A community or a shelter might not have prioritized the resources to pay for the surgery and the animal may be killed, but cost, resources, or holding periods do not

determine whether an animal is *categorized* as treatable.

Non-Rehabilitatable: Any animal with a condition or behavior with poor prognosis or a condition that is not curable even if the animal has a fair quality of life but requires lifetime maintenance or care.

A no-kill community is one where all healthy and treatable animals, including feral cats, are saved.

We acknowledge that vicious dogs cannot be placed in the community and these dogs are killed. From a behavior standpoint, we believe that they are properly classified as non-rehabilitatable. However, the TC SPCA has developed a rigorous protocol to ensure that no scared, shy, frightened, or treatable undersocialized dogs are killed, while ensuring that vicious ones are not placed in the community.

Irremediably Suffering: A non-rehabilitatable animal in severe pain.

Feral Cat: A cat under-socialized or not socialized to people.

We do not call feral cats "non-rehabilitatable" when there is nothing non-rehabilitatable about them. They occupy their own category since they require an altogether different kind of intervention by the shelter to save their lives.

Public Policy: Any animal ordered destroyed by a court of law or other government agency other than the Department of Animal Control. ■

The Framework

Accountability

Accountability means having clear definitions, a lifesaving plan, and keeping track of your successes and failures. It is of primary importance for a shelter to record not only how many animals enter the shelter, but what types of animals they are: How many are neonatal kittens and puppies? How many are dogs with behavior problems? How many are sick? What types of sicknesses are most common? How many are injured? How are they coming to the shelter—are they owner surrenders? Strays? Different problems have different solutions.

In 2001, 100% of healthy, friendly pets were saved, and overall 87% of all dogs and cats who entered the shelter found their way back to their caregivers or into new homes. So far, in the first four months of 2002, 92% of all dogs and cats who entered the shelter have left alive.

That makes Tompkins County one of the safest communities in the United States for homeless animals.

Categories and definitions like those above help determine the needs of the animals in your community. Once these are understood, the next step is to set goals—specific goals with timetables for getting there.

Accountability also entails reporting results to the community. The Tompkins County SPCA sends frequent updates to our local media and publishes an annual report. Our statistics are also posted on our website.

Perhaps most important, a shelter and its staff must be accountable for carefully and honestly evaluating each animal, as an individual, to decide which category the animal falls into. It is not enough for one staff member to look at a frightened dog or cat and decide that the animal does not fit the definition of “healthy” or “treatable.” Clear protocols should be established, and staff trained properly to ensure that each and every animal is given a fair evaluation and a chance for placement or treatment.

Understanding that the only rule that can't be broken is the no-kill rule, the bottom line is this: Evaluate and treat each animal as an individual and stay flexible. Too many shelters lose sight of individual animals, staying rigid with their 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 Framework

Accountability In Action: TC SPCA Dog Temperament Testing Protocol

Temperament testing is a series of exercises designed to test for aggression. It requires skill and training, and greatly depends on the environment in which the test is conducted, so if it is not done correctly, it can result in dogs being wrongly destroyed. The dog's own biology requires him to respond in one of three ways to unwanted stimuli: retreat, growl, or bite. The dog cannot say "leave me alone, I'm tired and lonely and scared." A dog may appear aggressive, but in reality simply be frightened by his new surroundings and by being away from the only owner he has ever known. Being able to determine which can mean the difference between life and death.

Two days after a dog arrives at the TC SPCA, the dog goes through an initial temperament test. If the dog shows signs of aggression, the dog



is extensively retested two days later. If the dog again shows signs of aggression, the staff

member must present the Executive Director with a detailed report, usually three to four pages long, with a one to two page narrative. At that time, a veterinarian from the Cornell University School of Veterinary Medicine Behavior Department will be consulted on the case and come to the shelter (or the dog will go to Cornell) for retesting by a veterinarian Board Certified in Behavioral Medicine. The DVM will then (1) re-evaluate the dog; (2) rule out a medical origin for the behavior; and (3) either pass the dog, recommend a course of rehabilitation or recommend the dog be killed. After that evaluation is received, the Executive Director will discuss the issue

with Cornell and SPCA dog training staff, then make the final determination.

All TC SPCA staff who have contact with shelter dogs have received training by Cornell Behaviorists in rehabilitation, testing, and interaction with dogs that show aggression. ■

Be fair! The dog's own biology requires him to respond in one of three ways to unwanted stimuli. The dog cannot say "leave me alone, I'm tired and lonely and scared."

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 one is an individual, and each deserves individual consideration. A strict policy helps ensure that the decision is reached correctly. And while staff may be involved in the decision-making process, ultimately, each death is the responsibility of the shelter director alone.

Lifesaving Programs

Spay/Neuter

Spay/neuter is the cornerstone of a successful lifesaving effort—the single most effective place to direct shelter resources. High volume spay/neuter will quickly lead to fewer animals entering the shelter system, allowing more resources to be allocated toward saving lives.

Do as I Do

Too many shelters operate under the hypocritical practice of “do as I say, not as I do.” If we are going to preach spaying and neutering, the local shelter should not be adopting out unaltered animals. A shelter must not contribute to overpopulation or kill the offspring of pets they themselves adopt out.

The TC SPCA increased the percentage of animals altered prior to adoption from 10% in 2000 to 100% in 2001. Here’s how:

Low Cost Spay/Neuter

Studies have shown that cost and access—not irresponsibility—are the primary reasons people do not alter their pets. In 2001, TC SPCA helped spay/neuter 568 pets of low-income Tompkins County residents. We also began holding the first free feral cat spay/neuter clinics in Tompkins County history, sterilizing over 100 cats for free in a single day during each clinic.

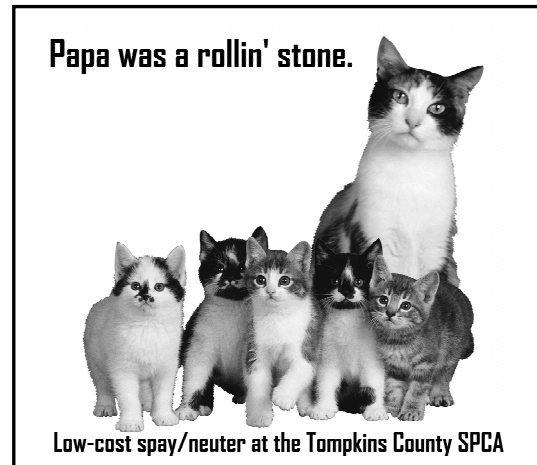
In addition, we have a year-round low-cost spay/neuter voucher program in conjunction with local veterinarians.

Enlist the Community

With financial support from a local dog fanciers’ club, the TC SPCA held the county’s first spay/neuter clinic for the dogs of low-income Tompkins County residents. To thank the club, we sent out press releases about the group’s involvement in the historic event, and took out an ad in the local paper. In return, they have set up a fund to allow us to continue spaying/neutering needy dogs for free.

Work with Local Veterinarians

Veterinarians are on the front lines against pet overpopulation: in Tompkins County, local veterinarians help sterilize all shelter animals, and they participate in our year-round low-cost voucher program. The SPCA pays 1/3 of the cost, the participating veterinarian covers 1/3, and the client pays 1/3. Under this arrangement, most pet owners pay approximately \$20 per animal.



Get the Word Out

We want the community to know that spay/neuter is important, and available. So in addition to holding low-cost/free clinics and setting a good example by altering all our animals prior to adoption, we advertise. Volunteers and shelter supporters post attractive pro-spay/neuter flyers—like the one above—all over Tompkins County. ■

Lifesaving Programs

Adoption Programs

Spay/neuter decreases the supply of dogs and cats. Equally vital to saving all adoptable and treatable pets is increasing available homes through innovative, aggressive adoption programs.

Shelter Hours: Convenient shelter hours mean more chances for adoptions. To avoid increased costs, shelters can open later in the day and stay open later—even one day a week—giving working people a chance to adopt or reclaim lost pets.

Adoption Outreach:

Not everyone can come to the shelter, so we bring the shelter to them. We set up mobile adoption centers in locations around the city. On-site staff and volunteer adoption counselors make sure each match is a good one. Some shelters even have permanent adoption storefronts in local malls.



Adoption outreach isn't just good for the animals—animals attract people, and that's good for businesses who host adoption sites.

Special Events: Neighborhood fairs, church picnics, craft fairs, and dog and cat shows are terrific opportunities to show available pets to the public.

Cost: Often, shelters must compete with pet stores and breeders. If it costs \$40 to buy a kitten from a pet shop, does it make sense for a shelter to charge \$80? TC SPCA adoptions range from \$15 for adult cats to \$30 for kittens and dogs. In addition, shelter animals are altered for only \$30 at the time of adoption.

We also let the public know the benefits of adopting from the shelter: a free veterinary visit, discounts at pet supply and gift stores, discounts on dog training classes, grooming discounts, free behavior advice, and a free handbook on understanding their new pet.

Advertising: TV and radio stations are often delighted to promote a "Pet of the Week." Photos of adoptable animals on a shelter website can give people a chance to take a look before they come to the shelter. And many newspapers sponsor adoption ads for humane groups.

When an animal is showcased in the media, calls will pour in to the shelter. Be sure staff let callers know about other specific animals available for adoption.

Email photos and descriptions of available pets to volunteers and shelters supporters, asking them to promote your animals. A little word of mouth goes a long way!

Adoption Incentives: Consider special incentive packages for long-term or "harder to place" shelter guests: 25 pounds of food, a special bed, or free medical care.

A Foster Program: Not only does a foster program provide in-home loving care for underage or recovering animals, it is also a great network for adoptions! If you trust them enough to bottle feed baby kittens for four weeks around the clock, trust them to adopt them or find responsible homes for the animals on your behalf.

Rescue Groups: In many communities, breed-specific and other rescue groups are ready, willing, and able to take animals out of the local shelter, care for them, and adopt the animals out. Ideally, the shelter will waive adoption fees for designated rescue groups.

The TC SPCA works with rescue groups in five states! ■

Lifesaving Programs

Pet Retention

While many of the reasons animals are surrendered to shelters are unavoidable, others can be prevented—but only if we are willing to work with people to help them solve their problems. Saving all healthy and treatable pets requires us 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. Use opportunities like adoption outreach, media spots, your website, public presentations, and in-shelter materials to show your community that the shelter is the best source of animal-related advice in town.

School's In

Tompkins County is home to some of the finest institutions of higher learning in the country. But dogs are getting an ivy-league education right here at the TC SPCA. Day one at the SPCA is a day to calm down and get used to the new environment. On day two, our trainers begin working with the dogs, teaching them to trust and preparing them for a life as beloved family members.

Every day, each dog at our shelter goes through a regimen of daily walks, off-leash play, dog-to-dog interaction and basic commands, or behavior rehabilitation, if necessary.

Socialization

The saying that there's no place like home is as true for animals as it is for people. No matter how comfortable a shelter is, it is a more stressful environment than a loving home. To help keep animals stress free and happy—and therefore more adoptable—staff and volunteers spend time walking dogs, petting cats, cuddling bunnies, and socializing our other adoptable pets.

Advice & Education

We reach out to the community with humane information on solving behavior problems and preventing them before they start. We have an extensive library of pet care and behavior fact sheets available in the shelter and on our website, and each week the TC SPCA has an article in the local paper, a spot on television, and a radio show where we feature topics like solving litterbox avoidance and



excessive barking. Since the amount of time a dog spends alone is a major factor in relinquishment, we also use media opportunities, fact sheets, and other outlets to encourage people to let their dogs indoors.

Our fact sheets and media spots also address topics like preventing allergies and what people should expect when they get a new pet—so there are no unwelcome surprises!

Veterinarian Visit

All TC SPCA adopters can bring their new friend to a veterinarian of their choice for a free exam within two weeks of adoption. We highly encourage adopters to take advantage of this visit in order to establish a relationship with a veterinarian.

Other Retention Programs

Other pet retention programs include free in-home dog behavior problem-solving by SPCA volunteers, low-cost dog training, pet friendly rental programs, dog daycare centers, dog walker referrals, and pet behavior classes. ■

Lifesaving Programs

Feral Cat Assistance

While feral and abandoned cats may face hardships, we don't think death is better than a less than perfect life. Many animals, such as raccoons, foxes, field mice, and others, face similar hazards and do not live extraordinarily long lives, yet we would never consider killing them "for their own good."



Nor should feral cats be defined as "non-rehabilitatable" simply because they are feral. Strategies for saving feral cats (and their offspring, who can make up the bulk of the kitten population in shelters) cannot rely solely on aggressive adoption programs or strategies appropriate for adoptable and treatable pets. The answer for feral cats lies in community-based programs that allow them to live out their lives side-by-side with the rest of us, while we devise other programs to humanely control their numbers. In Tompkins County, our

lifesaving ethic embraces the alley cats who share our community.

Although the "Trap, Neuter, Release" method of feral cat colony management has become increasingly accepted within the humane community, organized programs to help feral cats are not nearly commonplace enough. TNR is not only humane; it is the most effective way to reduce the number of homeless cats.

Spay/Neuter

In 2001, we began holding the first free feral cat spay/neuter clinics, with over 100 cats altered in one day. County residents bring the cats in for surgery, vaccinations, and a medical exam. After they have recuperated from surgery, the cats are released to their habitats.

Education

We maintain an extensive collection of feral cat fact sheets available at the shelter and on our website. Topics include "Humane Trapping," "Why TNR," "Resolving Neighbor Conflicts," and more.

Advocacy

The TC SPCA does not support requiring caregivers to "register" or license their cats, release colony locations, or conform to "minimum standards" of colony care. We are *against* policies such as cat licensing, limit laws, anti-feeding laws, cat confinement (indoor-only) laws, and other anti-cat campaigns.

Humane Officers with a New Attitude

While a good portion of our humane officers' day is spent responding to animal cruelty complaints, reuniting lost dogs, and making sure animals are properly cared for, TC SPCA officers also do what few, if any, other humane officers in the country do—they humanely trap feral cats for spay/neuter and then return them to their habitats. They have even picked up dogs and cats for spay/neuter from low-income residents, and then returned the pets after they have recuperated from surgery.

And our officers do not only come to the aid of dogs and cats. They have also rescued peacocks, goats, and iguanas. They even help baby birds who have fallen from their nests. But while our officers have a soft spot for animals, they are as tough as nails with those who would bring them harm.

Lifesaving Programs

Feral Cat Advocacy, cont'd

Feral cats are the offspring of abandoned cats—often several generations removed from pets who once lived in a home. They are hardy survivors, thriving and reproducing in nearly every climate zone on earth. Most who come to the shelter are healthy and in robust condition. Yet some shelters refuse to alter feral cats unless they are known to have a permanent caregiver.

If feral cats are accustomed to life in the wild, are healthy enough to be reproducing, and if they show no signs of illness or injury, why not alter them and release them to their habitats to live their natural lives with or without a human caregiver?



Organizations on even the smallest budget can start a feral cat program

- Offer free spay/neuter for feral cats. Even on a limited basis, it will make a difference.
- Buy a humane trap—or several—and share them with cat caregivers. Some trap distributors offer discounts to humane organizations. Or ask local pet supply stores or hardware stores to donate a trap to your group. Offer to display the store's name on the trap as a "thank you."
- Help resolve cat-related conflicts by advocating for feral cats and educating people about the importance and efficacy of TNR.
- Meet with local veterinarians and request that they provide free or discounted services for feral cats.
- Hold cat food drives for feral cat caregivers—ask your members to donate to the feral cat cause.
- Approach local pet supply stores and ask if you can set up a bin for customers to donate cat food purchased at the store.
- Offer classes on feral cat issues. Ask experienced caregivers to lead the classes and provide them with space. Advertise by telephone tree, flyers in local veterinary offices and free announcements in newspaper calendar sections. ■

Lifesaving Programs

Rehabilitation

Saving *healthy* animals requires an infrastructure of adoption programs and programs to keep animals in their homes. But saving *treatable* animals requires entirely different types of programs. Since these animals are not yet adoptable, more homes will not necessarily help them. They need medicine, surgery, foster care, or behavior rehabilitation before they are ready to be placed in new homes.

A shelter begins helping treatables 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.

Angels Among Us

The Angel Fund is 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—animals like Oliver.

One recent Saturday afternoon, a frantic call came in on our emergency line: a cat had just been hit by a car. We sprang into action. While en route, another call came in. The cat was hit *again* by another car. When the humane officers arrived, they found the black and white kitty on the side of the road. Veterinarians determined that he had a broken jaw and would lose an eye. Surgery was needed to repair both. Thanks to a specific gift to the Angel Fund, Oliver was given the surgery he needed and is now convalescing in a foster home. After four months of care, Oliver will come back to the shelter to find a loving home—one that will cherish him all the more because he is an “Angel.”



direction of the veterinary college faculty. Veterinary behaviorists also screen dogs with behavior problems and prescribe rehabilitative behavioral therapy.

Beauty Salon for Pets

Local groomers donate their services to wash, brush and fluff shelter animals so they look their best when potential adopters come calling.

Foster Programs

It is impossible to overstate the importance of a foster program for underaged kittens and puppies, undersocialized animals, and those recovering from medical treatment. Such a program not only vastly increases the number of animals a shelter can handle and place, but it directly involves community members in saving lives. At the same time, a foster program gives many treatable animals what they need the most: Tender Loving Care. ■

Veterinarians

Several times each week, local veterinarians come to the shelter to do rotations. They diagnose animals, give vaccinations, and administer medication and treatment. Our local veterinary college also brings veterinary students to 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

Involve the Community

No-kill begins with a decision by shelter leadership. But it cannot succeed without community support. How do you get the community involved? Do a good job, tell people about it, and ask for their help.

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People want to be part of a lifesaving effort, so take every opportunity to talk about the programs you have started, the animals you are saving, and the assistance you need: to volunteers, business owners, community members, social clubs, neighborhood groups, churches, landlords, veterinarians, dog and cat fancy clubs, dog trainers, rescue groups—the possibilities for involving the community are practically endless.

Volunteers

Volunteers are a dedicated “army of compassion” and the backbone of a successful no-kill effort. The TC SPCA has seen volunteers increase from a dozen to over 160 in less than one year—concurrent with our decision to stop killing healthy and treatable animals.

Volunteers do everything from medicating sick cats, training dogs with behavior problems, caring for them until space opens up at the shelter or—in the case of motherless puppies and kittens—giving around the clock care for weeks at a time. Our volunteers spent 10,000 hours last year walking dogs, grooming cats, helping with adoptions, and doing routine but necessary office work.

How does a shelter attract volunteers? Ask people for their help and tell them what their help will accomplish. Hold monthly open house tours/volunteer orientations, announcing them in your local paper’s calendar section. Your volunteers can be your best spokespeople—ask each to bring in one new prospective volunteer.

Retain volunteers by making it easy for people to share their time with you. Be flexible—let people

walk dogs on their lunch hour or foster kittens for two weeks if they can’t do six weeks.



Keep your volunteers in the loop by updating them regularly. At the TC SPCA we send a monthly email update to all volunteers that includes recently published articles, upcoming events, information on shelter animals, new procedures, etc. We also send more frequent emails asking for emergency foster care or giving time sensitive updates.

Media

The TC SPCA is either on the radio, television or newspaper an average of 20 days each month without paying for a single ad. Send out press releases, event announcements,

or touching rescue stories daily.

Fundraising

If you do a good job, tell people about it, and ask for their help, they will help. Share your successes. Share your challenges. Once people give you support, be unrelenting. They can say no, but always ask. We speak at community groups and always end by asking them “to support our lifesaving work by opening your hearts and wallets to the needy animals who make their way to the shelter.” And people generally always give.

Involve the Community

Legislation

Legislation is often thought of as a quick solution to pet overpopulation. "If only we had a law," the argument goes, "all the bad, irresponsible people out there would take care of their pets properly, and shelters wouldn't have to kill so many animals." But experience has proved that legislation is not a cure-all. In fact, it can have the opposite effect.

Studies show that the main reasons people do not alter their pets are cost and lack of access to services. The same is true for licensing. The higher the cost, the lower compliance with the law is. Because of this, lower-income pet owners, those who are ignorant of the law, and truly irresponsible people will not comply in significant numbers. Punitive legislation will only discourage people from caring for homeless pets or drive disadvantaged pet owners "underground," making them even harder to reach and help.

Compounding the problem is the fact that enforcement of ordinances such as pet limit laws, cat licensing, mandatory spay/neuter, confinement/leash laws, and "nuisance" laws is often selective and complaint-based, leaving pet owners and caregivers vulnerable to retaliation from neighbors and others. Worse, legislation may be worded so that the result of non-compliance is the impoundment and death of the animal.

Legislation can also be costly to enforce and divisive in the community, with fewer positive results than are gained by offering free or low-cost spay/neuter, a feral cat assistance program, and voluntary identification programs.

At the same time, legislation that focuses on requiring *shelters* to improve the quality and quantity of their services can be of benefit.

Shelters are in a position to set the standard and act as an example of proper animal care. Therefore, legislation requiring shelters to alter all their animals before adoption, to provide medical treatment to the animals in their care, and to lengthen holding periods, can go a long way towards saving the lives of companion animals.

Compassion Is the Way

The best way to work with the community to promote caring, compassion and responsible pet care is to help people do the right thing. That's why it is imperative that humane societies and rescue groups focus on incentives, not citations. It is far more effective to empower people to love and keep companion animals than to blame and punish them.

Communities that take a punitive approach often do not see substantial decreases in killing, and in some cases, killing rates have actually increased. These measures can drive a deep, sometimes irreparable, wedge between the community and the shelter. On the other hand, turning from controlling animals and the public to saving lives and supporting the community brings many rewards: a public perception of the shelter as lifesavers, increased employee morale, increased donations and increased volunteers.

Time and time again, we have seen that working cooperatively with people creates an atmosphere of trust and respect—a community where people willingly learn how to be responsible animal guardians and view the shelter as a resource, rather than the enemy. In communities that have built programs around this relationship, kill rate declines are unparalleled anywhere in the country.

Ending the killing of healthy and treatable pets means building, brick-by-brick, the programs, facilities, and community involvement necessary to lower birthrates, increase adoptions and keep animals with their loving, responsible caregivers. But most of all, it means believing in the community and trusting in the power of compassion. ■

Measuring Success

Top 10 Strategies for Saving Lives

Know thyself. How many animals coming into the shelter are neonatal kittens and puppies? How many are dogs with behavior problems? How many are sick? What types of sicknesses are most common? How many are injured? How are they coming to the shelter—are they surrendered by owners? Strays? Different problems need different solutions.

Free to Good Shelter. Volunteers are the lifeblood of any organization, providing endless enthusiasm, hard work, and TLC for the animals no shelter could afford to pay for or be without.

In Foster Parents We Trust. If you trust them enough to bottle-feed baby kittens for four weeks around the clock, trust them to adopt them or find homes for them on your behalf. Foster parents are a great network for homes. This is also true of rescue groups!

There Goes the Neighborhood. If people can't or won't come to the shelter, take the shelter to them. Have off-site adoptions at every neighborhood fair, grand opening, church bazaar, community event, or simply set up shop at corner malls, stores, and neighborhoods.

Yes, We're Open. Staying open after 5 pm on weekdays and all day Saturday and Sunday to give working people a chance to reclaim lost pets or adopt new ones doesn't necessarily mean more hours, just different ones. Even cash strapped public libraries manage to have public access hours!

Hear Ye! Hear Ye! Lend Me Your Ears! Get the word out on events and stories daily! Having an offsite adoption? Saved the life of an injured pet? Get those press releases out! Staying in the public eye raises awareness, increases the number of homes, and brings in the bucks.

Do As I Do. Shelters should not contribute to overpopulation or kill the offspring of pets they themselves adopt out by placing breedable animals in the community. Shelters without spay/neuter facilities can work out deals with local veterinarians.

Get By With a Little Help from Your Friends. Ask, ask, and ask for help—for money, for volunteers, for homes, for rescue groups, for foster parents. Speak at community groups and always end by asking them to support your lifesaving work by opening their hearts, homes, and wallets to the needy animals who make their way to your shelter.

Ignore Conventional Wisdom. Advice that comes from the old-guard organizations that fancy themselves the teachers of local shelters is often mired in the past and not terribly effective. Local shelters and rescue groups know their community better than anyone else. Look around, stay flexible, think creatively, and act boldly—even if it is not on the “approved” list of big-shelter practices.

Where There's a Will, There's a Way. No-kill begins and ends as an act of will. Do not ever accept that killing is a legitimate and appropriate “solution” to homeless pets. Stay focused, work hard, make sure there is a direct, lifesaving effect with the programs you implement, and get rid of the ones with no immediate impact. You'll get results.

Measuring Success

At the end of the day, you are only successful if the animals go home alive. The number of children reached through humane education is nice, the number of volunteer hours amassed is nice, the size of the endowment is nice. None of it amounts to much if the save rate (the percentage of animals going home alive) is not steadily increasing every year.

To meet that challenge, we need to get the community excited, to energize people for the task at hand. Everybody needs to be a part of the mission. And the measure of how much we succeed—or fail—is a function of what happens to the cat living in an alley in our community, whether the business downtown adopts a ‘pets at work’ policy, whether landlords will help our lifesaving goals by saying yes to renters with dogs, whether our neighbors adopt imperfect pets because they believe in our lifesaving mission. It is about the cafes, the storefronts, the squares, the neighborhoods. That is how we will be measured. That is what it takes to save all the lives at risk—regardless of how big or how small a shelter is.

By working with people, implementing lifesaving programs, and truly treating each life as precious, a shelter can transform a community. Twenty years after the no-kill movement began, saving every healthy and treatable dog and cat no longer needs to be a dream. ■

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Resources

The Tompkins County SPCA has an extensive array of fact sheets and materials available on our website. These can be used as is or modified for your own community.

- TC SPCA 2001 Annual Report
- Volunteer Applications
- Foster Parent Applications
- Why Adopt From The TC SPCA?
- Pet Lover's Guide To Your New Dog
- Pet Lover's Guide To Your New Cat
- Pet Lover's Guide To Your New Rabbit
- Pet Lover's Guide To Your New Mouse, Rat, Or Guinea Pig
- What Dogs Want
- Off-Leash Dog Parks
- Kong Is King
- Ten Steps To Doggy Bliss
- Choke And Shock Collars
- Puppy Development
- House Training
- Barking
- Helping The Shy Or Fearful Dog
- Spay/Neuter—Why? Where? How Much?
- Raising Kittens
- Coping With Cat Allergies
- Upper Respiratory Infection
- Living With Wildlife
- Humane Bird Deterrents
- Humane Mice Deterrents
- Human Raccoon & Skunk Deterrents
- Give Wildlife A Brake!
- Humane Cat Deterrents
- Trap, Neuter & Return
- Care & Feeding Of Feral Cats
- Feral Cats & Public Safety
- Humane Trapping
- Feral Cat Medical Issues
- Post-Surgery Recovery Care
- Raising Feral Kittens
- Feral Cat Socialization
- Feral Cat Relocation
- Resolving Neighbor Conflicts
- Feral Cats In Winter
- And more...

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