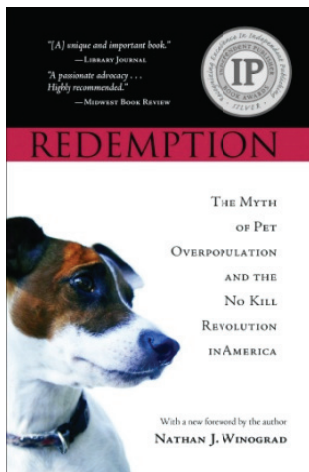


The Race is On

Australia, New Zealand, and the U.S. vie to see which will become a No Kill nation first

October 2009



*Beginning in 2008, the No Kill Advocacy Center began sending hundreds of free copies of *Redemption* to virtually every rescue group and shelter in Australia, with the assistance of the Australian organization *Pet Rescue* (petrescue.org.au). The effort resulted in the first media article addressing the No Kill philosophy and spurred the Animal Welfare League of Queensland, an open admission animal management/control shelter, to embrace the programs and services of the No Kill Equation. All told, 800 copies of the book were distributed throughout the Australian continent.*

*On September 30 – October 2, 2009, we participated in a national conference on the Gold Coast of Australia. Bringing together shelter directors, government officials, rescue groups and animal lovers from all over Australia and New Zealand, the No Kill Advocacy Center presented four workshops: *Building a No Kill Australia*, *The No Kill Matrix: What is a Savable Animal?*, *Developing Trap-Neuter-Release (TNR) in the Australian Context*, and *Reforming Animal Control/Management: A Discussion for CEOs, Managers and Leaders of Pounds & Shelters*.**

This was our message to our colleagues in Australia.

We were asked to answer the question of whether it was possible to achieve a No Kill Australia. We believe the answer is “yes.” Not only does the United States example says that it is—a model we believe shows great promise in Australia—but two communities in Australia are already proving it. Both the Gold Coast and the Australian Capital Territory are experiencing No Kill success. Understanding the model both the progressive U.S. and Australian communities used to achieve it provides powerful evidence that the issues are the same, the roadblocks are the same, and the solutions are the same. We are kindred spirits. And while far too many animals are still being needlessly killed in both U.S. and Australian shelters, we have a genuine solution at hand.

* Thanks to a gift of books and shipping costs from the author, and thanks to sponsorship by Pet Rescue (Australia), this effort did not require any expenditure of No Kill Advocacy Center funds.

The American Experience

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

The fundamental lesson from the experiences of these communities is that the choices made by shelter managers are the most significant variables in whether animals live or die. Several communities are more than doubling adoptions and cutting killing by as much as 75 percent—and it isn’t taking them five years or more to do it. They are doing it virtually overnight. In Reno, Nevada, local shelters led by the Nevada Humane Society in 2007 initiated an incredible lifesaving initiative that saw adoptions increase as much as 80 percent and deaths decline by 51 percent, despite taking in a combined 16,000 dogs and cats.

In addition to the speed with which it was attained, what also makes Reno’s success so impressive is that the community takes in over two times the number of animals per capita than the U.S. national average and as much as five times the rate of neighboring communities and major U.S. cities. But year-to-date in 2009, 93 percent for dogs and nearly 90 percent for cats are being saved, despite an economic and foreclosure crisis that has gripped the region. With an overall rate of lifesaving of roughly 90 percent of all animals, they are proving that communities can quickly save the vast majority of animals once they commit to do so, even in the face of public irresponsibility or economic crisis. This is consistent with the results in Charlottesville (VA), Tompkins County (NY), and others.

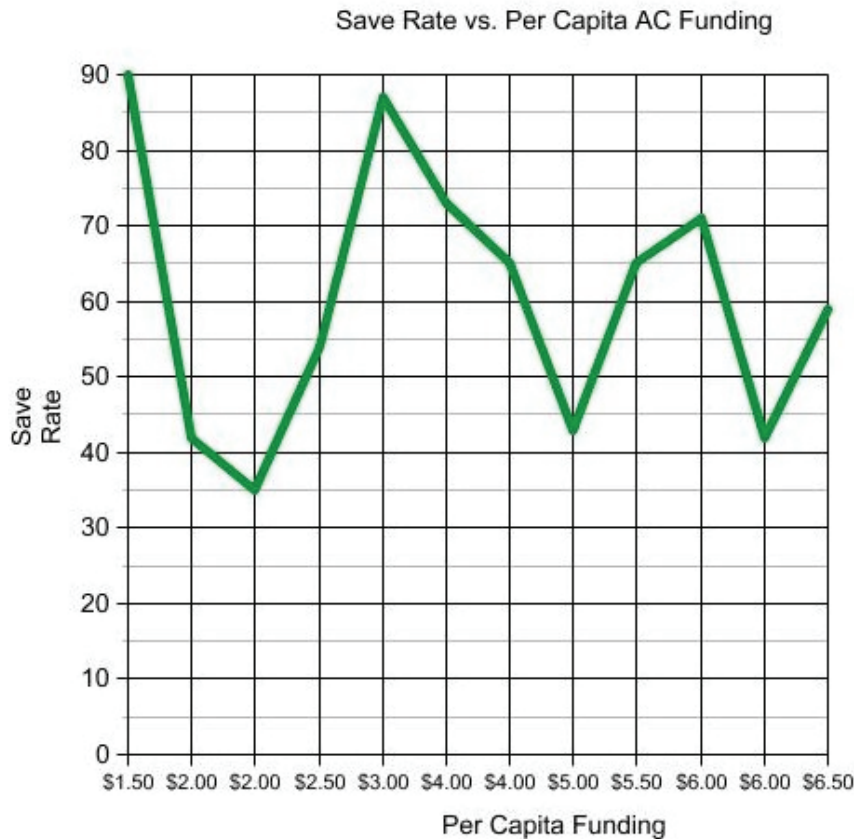
Unfortunately, many shelter directors remain steadfast in their refusal to embrace the No Kill paradigm. Among the various excuses for why it cannot be done, the two most common are that there are simply too many animals for the available homes (“pet overpopulation”) and that shelters are not given adequate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

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

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

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

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



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

While communities should provide adequate funding, only throwing money at “the problem” will do very little without leadership committed both to lifesaving and to accountability. In King County, Washington, the County Council has spent millions of additional dollars in both capital and operational improvements since three independent evaluations in 2007 and 2008 revealed high rates of illness, deplorable conditions, and high rates of killing at King County Animal Care & Control (KCACC). In fact, until recently, the King County Council has never denied a funding request for KCACC. But no improvement in animal care has been achieved. Follow-up assessments continue to criticize the agency for the same conditions previously blamed on lack of resources.

In Portland, Oregon, likewise:

Over the course of the past few years (fiscal years 2003 through 2008), a period during which the total number of animals brought into the shelter increased by only 5 percent and the agency’s budget increased by 50 percent (to a current \$4.6 million), nearly every measure of the agency’s performance documents failure. Adoptions are down by 40 percent (dogs) and 18 percent (cats). Nearly half of the dogs not returned to owners are killed; so too are nearly two-thirds of cats. The “kill rate” is now well above rates in neighboring counties facing far more severe budget limitations. Thousands of dollars are squandered on adversarial enforcement efforts that have achieved no meaningful improvement in the public’s safety.¹

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

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

These same demographics also tell us that every year, roughly 21 million are considering bringing a new dog or cat into their home, of which 17 million have not decided where they will

¹ That doesn't mean that governments should continue underfunding their shelters where they are doing so. Shelters with low per capita spending claimed difficulty sustaining programs. As a result, the study should not be used as an excuse to reduce shelter budgets.

get that animal and can be influenced to adopt from a shelter. Even if the vast majority of those 17 million (upwards of 80 percent) got a dog or cat from somewhere other than a shelter, U.S. shelters could still zero out the deaths of savable animals. On top of that, not all animals entering shelters need adoption: Some will be lost strays who will be reclaimed by their family (shelters which are comprehensive in their lost pet reclaim efforts, for example, have demonstrated that as many as two-thirds of stray dogs can be reunited with their families). Others are unsocialized feral cats who need neuter and release. Some will be vicious dogs or are irremediably suffering and will be killed. In the end, a shelter only needs to find new homes for less than half of all incoming animals.

From the perspective of achievability, therefore, the prognosis for widespread No Kill success is very good. But let's put all this aside. Let's assume "pet overpopulation" is real and insurmountable. To do that, we have to ignore the data. We also have to ignore the experiences of successful communities. In the United States, to accept the "No Kill is impossible" argument requires pretending the knowledge and the results do not exist.²

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

The Australian Experience

Before arriving in Australia, shelter directors across Australia were invited to a workshop we were holding entitled, "Reforming Animal Management: A Discussion for CEOs, Managers and Leaders of Pounds & Shelters." As part of that invitation, they were also surveyed about their attitudes to the No Kill philosophy and its achievability. The excuses were similar to those offered in the United States:

- We need tougher laws to make people responsible
- The animals are better off dead than adopted into low quality homes
- There are too many animals, not enough homes
- You can't adopt your way out of killing
- Not enough funding to save more lives
- No Kill is not achievable
- Any criticism of shelters is unfair because they are doing the public's dirty work

² There are communities which have achieved No Kill. Saying that No Kill is not possible, therefore, flies in the face of its achievement in communities across the United States.

- What works in the U.S. will not necessarily work in Australia

Why are these excuses and not true barriers to success? To begin with, they have been proven false in the U.S. context. And the United States and Australia share many similarities. Both are killing roughly half of all impounded animals. Both have almost identical rates of pet ownership. Adjusted for population, both are killing roughly the same number of animals. And Australian pet owners are spending slightly higher per capita on their animals than their American counterparts. In fact, like the American experience, spending on dogs and cats in Australia continues to grow, even as nearly all other sectors of the economy are in steep decline.

Moreover, recent studies in Australia show that the number of Australians every year who get a new pet for outpace the number killed annually in Australian pounds and shelters: As many as 1,000,000 Australians seek a new dog or cat every year; while roughly 400,000 are being killed annually. Like the United States, the real issue is not an overpopulation of dogs and cats—the thriving pet store trade contradicts this assertion—but market share borne of failure on the parts of shelters and pounds to compete with commercial sources of animals.

The problems in Australian pounds and shelters are *identical* to the problems in U.S. pounds and shelters. First, shelters have done a very poor job of marketing their animals and have contributed to a view of available animals as “damaged goods.” Second, shelters have taken the false position that free roaming cats are a threat to the local ecology and should be rounded up and killed. Third, a survey of rescue groups and animal advocates yielded the following complaints:

- Pounds are killing dogs and cats despite rescue groups requesting them
- Pounds are discriminating against breeds, particular Pit Bull-type dogs
- Pounds discourage volunteers
- Pounds are not treating ill or injured animals
- Pounds are not marketing animals for adoption
- Pounds discourage redemptions and adoptions through high fines and fees under “get tough” and “revenue raising” efforts.

In short, they are not comprehensively implementing the programs and services which provide an alternative to killing. But instead of doing so, Australian states and territories are making the same mistakes that U.S. municipalities do: following a model of punitive legislation that has not achieved in success in the United States, and that is not achieving success in Australia.

Under the Domestic Animals Act, municipalities are implementing punitive measures including pet limit laws, curfews/leash laws, mandatory licensing and microchip laws, stray cat feeding bans, mandatory desexing/sterilization laws, and other restrictions. The State of Victoria has also recently launched a program euphemistically called “Who’s for Cats?” telling citizens not to feed stray cats, but rather to call the local shelter, where the cat faces a seven out of ten chance of being killed. Victoria is clearly not for cats, but against them, pushing a paradigm of killing that is costing 74% of cats their lives.

In fact, both New South Wales and Victoria both report that their mandatory desexing and licensing laws have had no significant impact on impounds or death rates. Victoria is still killing

roughly the same percentage and number of dogs and cats as before these laws; as is New South Wales. Their own data analysis shows these laws for what they are: a failure.

Even in the U.S., the flagship of the traditional sheltering establishment has finally admitted that mandatory desexing/sterilization laws do not work:

To the knowledge of the ASPCA, the only method of population control that has demonstrated long-term efficacy in significantly reducing the number of animals entering animal shelters is the voluntary sterilization of owned pets. There is also evidence that sterilizing very specific, at-risk sub-populations of companion animals such as feral cats and animals in shelters can also contribute to reductions in overpopulation. *In contrast, the ASPCA is not aware of any credible evidence demonstrating a statistically significant enhancement in the reduction of shelter intake or euthanasia as a result of the implementation of a mandatory spay/neuter law.*

Even if shelter managers are going to ignore the data comparisons with the U.S., even if they are going to peddle the fiction that Australia is unique in this context, how can Australian pounds and shelters claim to be unique when they do not operate differently than those of the U.S.? They act the same way by killing, and they use the exact same excuses for why they cannot do better: by blaming others for their own failures. Australian demographics are nearly identical to their U.S. counterparts. And their own data and admissions show the punitive model of mandatory licensing, sterilization, and leash laws have been a near complete failure in lowering impounds and death rates.

Moreover, how would shelter managers know something will not work in Australia when most of the pounds and shelters have not tried? How can shelters save ill animals without medical care and rehabilitation? How can shelters save feral cats without TNR? How can they adopt more animals without competing more effectively with commercial sources of animals through comprehensive adoption campaigns, incentives, and marketing? How can they reduce impounds without high volume, low cost spay/neuter? They can't. So the programs that work in the United States will also work in Australia. But even if shelters do not believe that crossing the goal line of No Kill is achievable; put simply: it is indefensible for shelter managers to refuse to implement programs that would dramatically lower death rates at their pound because they lack the belief that those programs can eliminate killing entirely.

Finally, there are two good reasons to believe that what works in the U.S. will also work in Australia: 1. The Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (RSPCA) in the Australian Capital Territory; and, 2. The Animal Welfare League (AWL) of Queensland. These two shelters in Australia are having great success using the No Kill Equation model of sheltering. Both are open admission animal management/control shelters. Both have begun implementing the programs and services of the No Kill Equation, as an alternative to the punitive model advanced in shelters in places like Victoria and New South Wales. And both have had lifesaving results consistent with those of the United States.

Last year, the AWL of Queensland saved roughly 90 percent of all impounded animals. They were 1,300 animals shy of achieving their No Kill goals, but for 3,000 animals they impounded from outside their jurisdiction. In fact, they would have achieved No Kill for their entire community, if they had not taken in animals from outside their community. And the RSPCA of

the Australian Capital Territory is saving 93% of dogs and 78% of cats, identical to Reno's results in the first year of its No Kill initiative, and the save rate for cats continues to grow.³

While RSPCA shelters overall are killing 62% of cats and 34% of dogs, while Victoria shelters are killing 74% of cats and 31% of dogs, while many American shelters are also killing roughly 60-70% of cats and 35 to 40% of dogs, both the AWL of Queensland is now No Kill for both dogs and cats (saving at least 90%) and the RSPCA in the Australian Capital Territory is No Kill for dogs and saving roughly eight out of ten cats. In short, the No Kill Equation model of sheltering works in Australia. Two communities have proved it.

The Myth of Pet Overpopulation

Some rescue advocates have taken issue with the fact that pet overpopulation is a myth, arguing that widespread belief in it serves their goal of increasing sterilization of companion animals and placing restrictions on the commercial pet trade. There are plenty of good arguments for spay/neuter. Studies cited by government officials in both Victoria and New South Wales indicated that the majority of the owned pet cat population was already sterilized. Those that were not, not surprisingly, belonged to low income pet owners. By making spay/neuter affordable and widely available, shelters and pounds in Australia can increase the number of people who sterilize their animals. Regardless of the balance between numbers of animals entering shelters and numbers of available homes, the fewer the number who enter shelters, the less likely they are to be killed by shelter managers and their staff.

Moreover, given the anti-cat posture of many Australian laws, the fewer the number of free-roaming cats; the less likely they too will end up at shelters where they will be killed. By encouraging TNR, rather than banning feeding, these agencies can reduce the numbers of cats both on the street and entering shelters.

There are also plenty of good arguments for cracking down on the abusive puppy mill trade both in the United States and Australia, and for requiring pet stores that sell animals to require spay/neuter before sale, the same way some U.S. states require shelters to sterilize before adoption. Sterilization internalizes costs, which are currently borne by taxpayers and others. And puppy mills fuel over-breeding, inbreeding, minimal veterinary care, poor quality of food and shelter, lack of human socialization, overcrowded cages, neglect, abuse, and the killing of animals by those facilities when they are no longer profitable. They should be shut down.

Unfortunately, there is some evidence that the veterinary community in Australia is working to impede efforts to promote more affordable spay/neuter in deference to their profit motive. As such, they are behaving very similarly to groups like the American Veterinary Medical Association and many local Veterinary Medical Associations. While numerous U.S. studies show that low cost neutering doubles the number of poor people who sterilize their animals, and studies show that as many as 69% of low income pet owners say they would sterilize their pets if it was free, these studies also show that use of low and no-cost clinics does not impact veterinary profits as they tend to be used by poor people who would not otherwise sterilize

³ According to the director, TNR is illegal in the Australian Capital Territory which limits their ability to save feral cats.

their animals due to high cost. Nonetheless, these veterinary associations are now citing the availability of homes and the No Kill model as a reason not to promote affordable spay/neuter.

There will always be special interest groups that seize on our message to further their own self-interest; and these interests often have nothing to do with the best interests of the animals. To the extent that veterinary and other commercial interests in Australia or the U.S. oppose making spay/neuter widely available to low income groups by reducing or eliminating cost as a barrier, they should be condemned.

But peddling the fiction that there are “too many animals, for the too few homes available” does little to curb all of these abuses. And besides being demonstrably false, it gives underperforming shelters and pounds the excuse they need to kill savable animals. And that trade off is not only intolerable; it is not ours to make for the defenseless animals both U.S. and Australian pounds needlessly kill every year.

The myth of pet overpopulation gives regressive shelter managers and their national allies the excuse they need to kill. The myth of pet overpopulation legitimizes poor care at shelters by having the community focus on the “irresponsible public,” rather than the irresponsible managers in these shelters. The myth of pet overpopulation gives local governments a reason to promote punitive schemes that further harm animals. And the myth of pet overpopulation prevents even rescuers from demanding an immediate end to the paradigm of killing. Enough is enough.

The New Zealand Experience

While we are less familiar with the experience of New Zealand shelters, anecdotal evidence presented by shelter directors at the Australian conference also show similarities to the Australian and U.S. experiences. Shelter directors in New Zealand report similar baselines and similar increases in lifesaving by implementing the programs and services of the No Kill Equation.

In fact, the head of one of New Zealand’s largest shelters offered a challenge at the conference: New Zealand will be the first No Kill nation. The Australian delegation accepted the challenge. We accepted it on behalf of the United States. *The race is on.*

Only time will tell if our 15-year head start will be enough to overcome the intransigence of uncaring shelter directors, their shirking staff, the government bureaucrats that protect them, and the national organizations such as the Humane Society of the United States which continue to legitimize the killing.

Appendix: The No Kill Equation

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

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

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

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

The mandatory programs and services include:

I. Feral Cat TNR Program

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

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

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

III. Rescue Groups

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

IV. Foster Care

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

V. Comprehensive Adoption Programs

Adoptions are vital to an agency's lifesaving mission. The quantity and quality of shelter adoptions is in shelter management's hands, making lifesaving a direct function of shelter policies and practice. If shelters better promoted their animals and had adoption programs responsive to community needs, including public access hours for working people, offsite

adoptions, adoption incentives, and effective marketing, they could increase the number of homes available and replace killing with adoptions. Contrary to conventional wisdom, shelters can adopt their way out of killing.

VI. Pet Retention

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

VII. Medical and Behavior Programs

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

VIII. Public Relations/Community Involvement

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

IX. Volunteers

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

X. Proactive Redemptions

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

XI. A Compassionate Director

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

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