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[Home](#)

[Categories](#)

[Archives](#)

May 17, 2010

Moving the goalposts toward increased lifesaving

Last week, Tamsen Kingry and I attended the annual Expo of the Humane Society of the United States in Nashville. I had the honor of speaking on the morning of the first day of that national meeting as a part of a day long program presented by Maddie's Fund on creating adoption guarantee communities. My particular topic as a part of that program was about how to move your community toward adoption guarantee and overcome resistance.

The chance to speak along with other humane leaders from around the country on the subject of how to move our communities and our nation toward ending the indefensible killing of healthy and treatable homeless animals was deeply rewarding and energizing to me. When the Richmond SPCA first undertook a decade ago to become a no-kill organization and to work to make our community no-kill, it was highly controversial and out of the national mainstream. It was a remarkable step for one of the oldest humane organizations in the country. We stood up to a lot of criticism for that commitment. Over the intervening years, the correctness of our decision has been confirmed as we have seen a steady movement of other substantial and credible organizations around the country toward the adoption of some version of the adoption guarantee model. (I see no real difference in the terms "no-kill" and "adoption guarantee" other than personal preference.) Now, the HSUS, the ASPCA and the National Federation of Humane Societies have all embraced clearly articulated visions of adoption guarantee as the appropriate model for our nation's communities and have committed to working for that outcome.

What this all means to me is that the goalposts have been moved a very long way in the right direction. It will doubtless take a while to get to across the goal line all over this country. But, the crucial change that we have watched occur is the growing acknowledgement at the highest levels within our field that a no-kill philosophy is both the right one morally and also an achievable outcome within a very reasonable period of time. The credit for this movement belongs to Rich Avanzino for having had the vision and the courage to articulate and act on that moral conviction before anyone else did. His courageous pioneering of this vision at the San Francisco SPCA and his relentless pushing of this vision at Maddie's Fund have lifted those goalposts and moved them forward for the rest of us. Maddie's Fund has done so much to transform this nation and has been so good to us in their unflinching support for our work in Richmond.

My great pride for the Richmond SPCA is that our Board was one of the first to recognize the rightness and the compelling nature of Rich's vision and had the remarkable courage to make our organization a very earlier adopter of what was to become the way of the future. My gratitude goes out to Ed Sayres and Wayne Pacelle because they both have taken courageous steps to help push this issue as a part of a healthy national dialog and to make it safe for so many other organizations and communities to now embrace it.

I came back from Nashville deeply proud of our field and deeply grateful for the role that I have been allowed to play. It gave me a new optimism for a much better future for our wonderful animal companions and re-energized for the essential role that the Richmond SPCA has and will continue to play as a national leader in transforming this into a more compassionate nation and a safer environment for our homeless companion animals.

5/19/2010

Moving the goalposts toward increased...

Robin Robertson Starr is the chief executive officer of the Richmond SPCA. To read her complete biography, or that of our other bloggers, please [click here](#).

Posted by Robin Starr on May 17, 2010 at 08:47 AM in [Animal Welfare Philosophy](#) | [Permalink](#)

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