

DEFINING No Kill

no-kill /noh kil/ adjective

Ending the killing of all but the most severely suffering animals.

A No Kill animals shelter applies these standards to all species of animals under its care, including, but not limited to companion mammals, reptiles, amphibians, birds, aquatic animals, and wildlife it does not kill.

- Companion animals not accepted based on arbitrary criteria such as color, age, perceived to be aggressive, or perceived breed.
- Orphaned animals, pregnant animals, and newborns; animals labeled "behavioral" or "medical" that require special care; animals rendered for euthanasia; animals that are independently surrendered for euthanasia; animals that are surrendered to the shelter and are determined to be euthanized; animals that are socially unsocialized or dogs, 's
- Animals suffering from untreatable, contagious illness;
- Traumatized dogs or cats that are socially unsocialized or dogs, 's

A Publication of the No Kill Advocacy Center



What it
means
when an
animal
shelter
calls
itself

NO KILL



**An end to the killing of
all non-irremediably
suffering animals.**

“Irremediable suffering” means an animal who has a poor or grave prognosis for being able to live without severe, unremitting *physical* pain even with prompt, necessary, and comprehensive veterinary care.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

HOW DOES A SHELTER ACHIEVE NO KILL?

THE first step to No Kill success is a decision by a shelter’s leadership to reject kill-oriented ways of doing business, to replace a regressive, anachronistic 19th century model of failure with 21st century innovations by comprehensively implementing the programs and services of the No Kill Equation.

Animals enter shelters for a variety of reasons and with a variety of needs, but until recently, the “solution” was always the same: adopt a few and kill the rest. The No Kill Equation provides a humane, life-affirming means of responding to every type of animal entering a shelter, and every type of need those animals might have. Some animals entering shelters are community cats who are not social with humans. At traditional shelters, they are killed, but at a No Kill shelter, they are sterilized and released back to their habitats. Some animals entering shelters are orphaned, neonatal puppies and kittens. At traditional shelters, these animals are killed. At a No Kill shelter, they are sent into a foster home to provide around-the-clock care until they are eating on their own and old enough to be adopted. Some animals have medical or behavior issues. At a

traditional shelter, they are killed. At a No Kill shelter, they are provided with rehabilitative care and then adopted. Whatever the situation, the No Kill Equation provides a lifesaving alternative that replaces killing.

While shelter leadership drives the No Kill initiative, it is the community that extends the safety net of care. Unlike traditional shelters—which view members of the public as adversaries and refuse to partner with them as rescuers or volunteers—a No Kill shelter embraces the people in its community. They are the key to success: they volunteer, foster, socialize animals, staff offsite adoption venues and open their hearts, homes, and wallets to the animals in need. The public is at the center of every successful No Kill shelter in the nation. By working with people, implementing lifesaving programs and treating each life as precious, a shelter can be transformed.

THE NO KILL EQUATION



- Volunteers
- Rescue Partnerships
- Foster Care
- Sterilization & Release
- Comprehensive Adoption Programs
- Medical & Behavior Prevention & Rehabilitation
- Pet Retention
- Proactive Redemptions
- Public Relations/Community Involvement
- High-Volume Sterilization
- Compassionate, Dedicated, Capable Leadership

WHICH ANIMALS ENTERING SHELTERS BENEFIT FROM THE NO KILL PHILOSOPHY?



GUIDING PRINCIPLES

All of them.

THE principles of the No Kill philosophy apply to all species of animals, including, but not limited to, companion mammals, reptiles, amphibians, birds, aquatic animals, “farmed” animals, and wildlife. A No Kill shelter does not kill animals such as:

- Community dogs and cats, regardless of whether they are perceived to be friendly or unsocial with humans (“feral”);
- Orphaned animals, pregnant animals, *in utero* animals, or animals with newborns;
- Animals suffering from or exposed to a treatable, contagious illness;
- Poorly socialized dogs, shy dogs, or traumatized dogs;
- Animals surrendered for “euthanasia” (the animals must be independently evaluated by a veterinarian and determined to be irremediably suffering);
- Treatable animals labeled “behavior” or “medical;”
- Animals with “behavior” or “medical” impediments even if they have been signed over “for euthanasia;”
- Animals based on arbitrary criteria such as color, age, or breed.



CAN AN “OPEN ADMISSION” SHELTER BE NO KILL?

YES

NO Kill shelters can be public or private, large or small, humane societies or municipal agencies. But national organizations routinely mislead people that so-called “open admission” animal control facilities cannot be No Kill. The ASPCA, for example, has written that, “A no-kill shelter really can’t have an open admission policy. It must limit its intake if it wants to adopt out animals and not kill them.” This is false. A No Kill shelter can be either “limited admission” or “open admission.” And there are No Kill animal control shelters and thus No Kill communities which prove it.

Conversely, an “open admission” shelter does not have to—and should not—be an open door to the killing of animals. In fact, using the term “open admission” for kill shelters is misleading. Kill shelters are *closed* to people who love animals. They are *closed* to people who might have lost their job or lost their home and can no longer take care of their animal but do not want their animal to die. They are *closed* to Good Samaritans who find animals but do not want them killed. They are *closed* to animal lovers who want to

help but will not be silent in the face of needless killing. And so they turn these people and their animals away, refusing to provide to them the public service they are being paid tax dollars to perform. “Open door” does not mean “more humane” when the end result is mass killing.

Ironically, kill shelters are so enmeshed in their so-called “open door” philosophy that they are

blind to any proactive steps that might limit the numbers of animals coming in through those doors, like pet retention programs, or that might increase the numbers of animals adopted, like comprehensive marketing campaigns. And, most of all, they are blind to the fact that open admission shelters can be No Kill and that they already exist throughout the nation.



NO KILL STARTS AS AN ACT OF WILL: THE DECISION TO END SHELTER KILLING THROUGH AN EMBRACE OF PROVEN METHODS, FLEXIBILITY, IMAGINATION AND OFTEN, MORAL COURAGE.



GUIDING PRINCIPLES

WHILE reaching a 90% live release rate is a milestone on the road to No Kill, it is not the finish line. As such, communities with live release rates in excess of 90% should be celebrated when they have had lower rates in the past, but a 90% rate alone does not mean they are No Kill or that further innovation is unnecessary. There are several reasons why.

First, the 90% benchmark was promulgated with a very limited data set when the No Kill movement was just beginning to gain traction in the early 2000s. Today, there are cities and towns across America above 95% of the animals and, of those, there are communities with live release rates of 97%, 98%, even 99%, proving that 90% is too low.

Second, advancements in veterinary medicine have made some commonplace, once fatal illnesses treatable, such as parvovirus. Parvovirus often has a good to great prognosis for recovery. In the past, it was a death sentence in a shelter. Moreover,

**DOES A 90% LIVE
RELEASE RATE
EQUAL NO KILL?**

advancements in our understanding of dog behavior have also allowed us to rehabilitate dogs who were once deemed non-rehabilitatable and dangerous. Today, greater rates are possible so a shelter’s duty to animals demands that *today’s* performance no longer be measured by *yesterday’s* standards.

More importantly, some shelters that have live release rates of 90% or more still kill healthy and treatable animals. For example, a municipal shelter in Michigan has a live release rate of 98%, but requires anyone turning in a community cat who is

NO



Similarly, a California community has a 90% live release rate for dogs and cats, but only after impounding highly adoptable kittens and puppies from outside the city, while local animals—shy animals, older animals, animals who lack basic training—are killed. Moreover, roughly half of all other animal species—rabbits, hamsters, and birds, for example—continue to be killed.

The goal of the No Kill movement is not to simply reduce the killing to some consensus-based percentage. *It is to end the killing of animals who are not irretrievably suffering and thus return the term “euthanasia” to its dictionary definition.* Otherwise, the movement legitimizes the killing of animals who can and should be saved. Shelter staff should never feel okay about killing, regardless of whether the animals are healthy, have treatable conditions such as ringworm, are categorized as “feral,” or happen to be of a species other than a dog or a cat.

not social with humans (“feral”) to fill out a “euthanize card,” even if they are healthy. Another has a live release rate of 99%, but transfers the vast majority of animals to a killing shelter in another community.

HOW IS IT DETERMINED IF A PARTICULAR ILLNESS IS TREATABLE?

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

In order to prevent shelters from misclassifying animals, the No Kill Advocacy Center, working with shelter veterinarians, has created a matrix of conditions, found on our website, that would qualify as rehabilitatable. This is a “living” document, subject to continuous revision, as conditions that a few years ago would have had a poor prognosis, such as young puppies with parvovirus, are now highly treatable.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

A No Kill shelter places all animals who are not irretrievably suffering, including those who are unweaned, sick, injured, and traumatized.

Some hopelessly ill animals are living without pain and can continue to do so, at least for some time. This includes,

WHAT ABOUT HOPELESSLY ILL ANIMALS WHO STILL HAVE QUALITY OF LIFE?

for example, dogs diagnosed with cancer or cats with renal failure who can often survive for months or years beyond initial diagnosis through changes to diet and frequent administration of subcutaneous

fluids. The rapidly expanding field of veterinary palliative and foster-based hospice programs manage care and pain to provide and expand both quantity and quality of life.



GUIDING PRINCIPLES

CATS are often killed in shelters for being unsocial with humans (“feral”), for being shy (falsely labeled “unadoptable”), or for being fractious/aggressive, such as overstimulation biters. None of these excuses are consistent with the No Kill philosophy. They are instead pretexts for convenience killing since cats do not pose a public safety risk and can be sterilized and released. And like dogs, it is often the stress of being in the shelter environment that causes cats to act “feral.” A study of shelter cats found that cats who are gently petted and talked to not only have a markedly lower chance of getting an upper respiratory infection due to stress, but also significantly reduced “behavior” issues. The study found that while 18% of the cats tested would have been deemed “aggressive” when the study started (and thus killed), none of the cats responded that way after day six. This is also true of cats who could not be touched when they arrived and were stroked “mechanically” with a fake hand.

WHAT ABOUT “AGGRESSIVE” CATS?

The study concluded that “a 3-4 day holding period” is not “sufficient to differentiate non-feral from feral cats.” So not only do staff lack the expertise to make such determinations, not only is it inhumane to kill feral cats, and not only is there no such thing as an “irremediably psychologically suffering” cat (see page 8), but cats are often killed before a valid determination about their temperament can even be made.

Indeed, when the shelter in Tompkins County, New York embraced the No Kill philosophy in 2001, it did not have a “behavior” category for cats: if the cats entering that shelter were community cats who were not social with humans, they were sterilized and released to their habitats; if they were shy or fractious, they were cared for until a suitable home could be found. The “open admission” animal control shelter did not kill any cats due to behavior during the tenure of its then-director, proving that there is no legitimate reason to do so now.

MARKETING CATTITUDE

Cats who are not social with humans or who have behavior issues do not pose a public safety risk. For cats who are not “feral” but are generally intolerant of human touch, “attitude” is the most appropriate term, an attribute that many people find both amusing and even endearing. In fact, one shelter which experienced a large influx of grouchy, small animals used the animals' dispositions as a marketing tool, offering reduced adoption fees on all “Petzillas.” Another also used humor, successfully adopting out particularly cranky cats by throwing in a free “petting tool”—a long-handled back scratcher—to allow adopters to gently stroke their fiercely independent new friend from a comfortable distance.



WHAT ABOUT “AGGRESSIVE” DOGS?

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

DOGS who are deemed aggressive; have a poor to grave prognosis for rehabilitation; and, pose an immediate threat of bodily injury to people are still routinely killed, even by many shelters that embrace the No Kill philosophy. Thankfully, the number who fit this definition are low: only 1-2% of dogs. Nonetheless, their killing is ethically problematic.

Rather than providing them continued treatment and sanctuary care, they are being killed, often by a process that fails to take into account several things: dogs are under duress in shelters and often act in ways that are dissimilar to their behavior out of one; the shelter environment—loud, stressful, inappropriate housing, and lacking adequate socialization—itself can cause the behavior or prevent full rehabilitation; dogs have experienced a recent trauma (including separation from their families); there may be a medical origin for the perceived aggression; there are other possible solutions and alternative placements.

One analysis that looked at two of the most popular temperament tests for aggression used in shelters found that their predictive ability was no

better than a coin toss. In addition, there are cases of people falsely claiming dogs have behavior problems in order to assuage guilt for surrendering; disgruntled neighbors and estranged spouses who surrender dogs out of spite and claim aggression; and bites which turned out to be provoked or accidental.

By contrast, shelters that do not use temperament testing as a “pass/fail” proposition have proven that even dogs with multiple bite histories can be safely rehabilitated. Moreover, in a recent study conducted at a municipal shelter run under a police department, 90% of dogs who failed a temperament test and were sent to a trained and qualified foster home for further evaluation and behavior modification were rehabilitated and safely adopted, instead of killed for “aggression” as they would have been in past years. This included dogs with barrier reactivity, fear-based aggression, resource guarding, kennel stress, prey drive, and bite history. Some of the dogs also had secondary issues including extremely high energy, possible dog aggression, dog selectivity, fear of men, undersocialization, separation anxiety, and reactivity.

As shelters nationwide achieve greater lifesaving

innovation, an even greater philosophical tension will emerge from the continued killing of “aggressive” dogs which must be met by greater effort and determination to provide safe, alternative placement for such animals, such as expanded sanctuary options, with the understanding that a sanctuary should not be seen as a place where one gives up on animals with extreme trauma. Instead,

sanctuaries should be seen as an environment where the animal is protected during long-term rehabilitation and then adopted out or, in rare cases as necessary, provided permanent placement that meets the needs of the individual for life. The No Kill Advocacy Center welcomes such innovation and will continue to work to hasten such outcomes so that with time, they, too, become the norm.

Diagnosis:

Irremediable Psychological Suffering?

There's No Such Thing

THE No Kill Advocacy Center defines “irremediable suffering” as an animal who has “a poor or grave prognosis for being able to live without severe, unremitting *physical* pain even with prompt, necessary, and comprehensive veterinary care,” such as animals in fulminant organ system failure. But some shelters have suggested that the definition is too narrow as it does not allow for mental suffering. Can dogs, cats, and other animals be so traumatized that they should not be—indeed would not want to be—alive? In short, is there such a thing as “irremediable psychological suffering”? No. There is no such thing as an animal who is irremediably psychologically or behaviorally suffering. There is no such thing as an animal who is so traumatized that he wants to die.

The view that animals can experience irremediable psychological suffering not only flies in the face of every living being’s instinctive will to live, but an animal’s own reaction to the perception that she may be in harm’s way—which is not to run *towards* a threat to her life, but to flee it or display aggression as a means of deterring it. Indeed, humans are the only species in which suicide is documented (and even then, suicide is not performed or sanctioned by the medical community

as a means of addressing a diagnosis of irremediable psychological suffering). It, therefore, does not make sense to respond to trauma or fear in an animal by doing the very thing a traumatized animal’s behavior demonstrates they are desperately trying to avoid: *being harmed*.

Indeed, it is difficult to imagine any scenario in which one human being could confidently say another human being suffering “psychological pain” would be better off dead and feel justified in ending that person’s life, especially without that person’s consent as is done for animals. Such conditions are simply not regarded as “irremediable” or a death sentence. Instead, when confronted with people suffering psychological trauma, the response is to seek a remedy to help them no longer feel that way. There does not seem to be a justification for a different standard for animals.

When veterinarians speak of “irremediable physical suffering,” moreover, they have objective measures; baseline values against which to compare any lab or pathology data and experience with medications or other medical intervention which have been attempted. In other words, prompt, necessary, and comprehensive veterinary care has failed, the condition is beyond medicine’s ability to

ONE OF THE CENTRAL PROBLEMS IN SAVING THE LIVES OF ANIMALS IS THAT SHELTERS, THEMSELVES, DO HARM. AND IT IS THE TRAUMATIZED ANIMALS WHO ARE HARMED THE MOST. IF SHELTERS ARE ALLOWED TO HAVE THE EXCUSE OF INTRACTABLE MENTAL ILLNESS, THEY WILL JUST LABEL ANIMALS THAT WAY AND KILL THEM. SHELTERS MUST REJECT THE NOTION THAT DEATH ITSELF IS A “TREATMENT” OPTION AND THAT IT DOESN’T HARM ANIMALS, EVEN THOUGH SUCH A VIEW IS ENDEMIC TO SHELTERING, TO THE “ANIMAL PROTECTION” INDUSTRY IN GENERAL, AND TO MANY IN THE VETERINARY COMMUNITY.

care for or manage, and the animal is suffering severe, unremitting pain. Psychological suffering fails on these counts. While there are some objective measures—skin conductance, heart rate and blood pressure, salivary cortisol levels, and even stereotypical behaviors—*at best*, these measure current mental state, not future behavior or, more accurately, “resilience,” the successful adaptation and recovery from the experience of severe adversity. *At worse*, these measures are meaningless, especially if there are no baselines for the individual animal, which there almost never are in the shelter environment. The end result is that there are simply no objective measures to make an adequate determination as to the degree of psychological suffering. And shelter personnel and the veterinary community in general are not qualified to do so in the absence of objective criteria. In fact, in no other sub-discipline do veterinarians make medical determinations without data.

Moreover, even if an animal is suffering psychologically and even if it were determined,



with certainty, that some mental scars would always remain and the animal will always need some level of protection or care consistent with the behavioral expression of those scars, this doesn't mean that she cannot recover to a point of happiness and good quality of life.

In fact, a lot of people live with traumatic psychological scars successfully. Studies on human resilience show that social support, with an emphasis on positive emotions, is a strong buffer against post-traumatic stress disorder and other psychological problems. Indeed, social support can

The placement and treatment criteria for traumatized animals should depend on the severity of the duress: 1. The animal can go to a home; 2. The animal needs some rehabilitation and then can go to a home; 3. The animal has special needs and requirements that require knowledge; 4. The animal has special needs that require longer-term rehabilitation and/or drugs; 5. The animal needs long term help and sanctuary.

result in successful adaptation and recovery after experiencing severe adversity, increasing both the speed of recovery and level of mental health and well-being. According to one analysis, “human studies clearly show that an extended social network and positive experiences are important factors contributing to resilience.” Similarly, “[animal] research using environmental enrichment strategies, i.e. using social housing with plenty of opportunities for play, has suggested an important role for social contact and positive experiences in

resilience to social defeat.” The three core experiences associated with recovery are forming a secure attachment, positive emotions, and purpose in life. For animals, this means a loving, new home.

Depending on the severity of the condition, there may also be a need for behavioral rehabilitation protocols and even drug therapy. In extreme cases, where the animal is tormented or, in the case of a dog who poses a direct and immediate risk to public safety, there may be a need for a sanctuary environment.



Until

EVERYONE



Is Safe

Even if it is conceded that saving the animals that fall outside the current safety net of care poses greater challenges than saving the others, the answer is not to falsely categorize objectively savable animals as “irremediably suffering” nor to water down the definition of No Kill so that more communities can claim the title; claiming the title “No Kill” isn’t the goal, not killing is.

The answer is to acknowledge the remaining challenges and to commit to finding solutions as has been done for other at risk shelter populations.

WHAT ABOUT WILD ANIMALS?

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

MANY wildlife rehabilitators use variants of the same excuses that regressive shelters use to rationalize the killing of companion animals in shelters to rationalize the killing of wild animals. Species bias—the wildlife rehabilitation movement’s equivalent of sheltering’s breed bias—is endemic to wildlife rescue. Rehabilitators and shelters that subscribe to this view refuse to treat those animals who do not fall within their limited scope of compassion, either because the animals in question are individuals from a numerous and thriving species, such as rats, pigeons or crows, or because they are cruelly and erroneously perceived as “non-native,” a pejorative term of intolerance based on an idea that has been thoroughly rejected in the treatment of fellow human beings—that the value of a living being can be reduced merely to its ancestral place of origin.

The only attention such rehabilitators are often willing to give these animals is to kill them. Indeed, No Kill shelters which partner with wildlife “rehabbers” (or undertake wildlife rescue themselves) should not favor convenience killing over rehabilitation, or death over sanctuary care. They should adopt out those who cannot be returned safely to the wild (a legal option for some species) and they should reject the self-serving

philosophy that equates killing with kindness when the animal in question is not mortally suffering.

Where it is not legal to rerelease these animals or adopt them into homes if needed, shelters should be at the forefront of changing those laws. Ensuring that every animal entering a shelter—whether classified as “domestic” or “wild”—is treated fairly, compassionately and as an individual whose right to life is paramount is, after all, what the No Kill movement is all about.



GUIDING PRINCIPLES

THERE are methods of calculating what some call the “live release rate” or “save rate” that allow shelters to exclude whole categories of animals. For example, the Asilomar Accords, favored by traditional shelters, allow shelters to exclude animals who die in their kennels (generally because of poor care). Under pressure to decrease killing, there are several cases of shelter directors allowing sick/injured animals to go without food and medication in order to die so they won’t be counted in reported statistics. This is

HOW IS THE LIVE RELEASE RATE ACCURATELY CALCULATED?

cruel, but it is just one of the perverse incentives in the Asilomar Accords. Another is excluding animals who are surrendered for “euthanasia” by their families. Some shelters require anyone who surrenders an animal to sign them over “for euthanasia,” that way the ones they kill—even those who are healthy or treatable—do not count.

To calculate the live release rate honestly and accurately, all live animals must be included, including those surrendered for “euthanasia,” deaths in kennel, missing/lost animals, community dogs and cats, and all breeds, regardless of whether the shelter is located in an area where certain dogs are banned.



How to Calculate a Shelter’s Live Release Rate

THE live release rate is calculated as follows: C divided by A. For example, if a shelter takes in 100 animals a year and 80 are adopted, reclaimed, transferred to No Kill rescue groups or still on hand, the shelter live release rate is 80%. Conversely, its death rate (B divided by A) is 20%. The live release rate plus the death rate should always equal 100% of live intakes.

LIVE RELEASE RATE

$\frac{C}{A}$

THE
FORMULA

$\frac{B}{A}$

DEATH RATE

- A:** All animals who were in the shelter’s custody at the beginning of the reporting year and all live intakes including those considered “owner requested euthanasia” with only the following exception: animals brought to a shelter’s medical clinic for procedures such as vaccines or sterilization where it was understood that the person was going to retrieve their animal following the medical procedure.
- B:** All deaths: animals who were killed (including “owner requested euthanasia”), animals who died in the shelter’s custody or constructive custody (such as foster care) and animals who are missing and unaccounted for.
- C:** All animals who are alive: those adopted, reclaimed by their families, transferred to No Kill rescue groups or other shelters (where they are not at risk for being killed) and those still in the shelter’s custody.

What if the Shelter Will Not Provide Statistics?

If the municipal shelter will not provide statistics on request, advocates should file a formal demand under their state's Public Records Act. Shelters should freely provide statistics on their website and in response to requests without requiring a formal public records or freedom of information law request. A good rule of thumb is that if a shelter refuses to provide these statistics willingly and easily, they have something to hide.



DOES A SHELTER STILL QUALIFY IF IT TRANSFERS A LOT OF ANIMALS?

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

ONE of the key programs of the No Kill Equation is working with rescue groups. On average, a well functioning shelter sends roughly 15% of animals to rescue groups. The idea is that rescue groups *expand* the shelter's adoption program, particularly with more challenging animals, not *replace* it. But regardless of whether they send more or less, to the extent a shelter sends animals to rescue groups or other shelters, the receiving agencies must also meet the criteria in this guide. One No Kill shelter required rescue groups to stipulate that they would not kill the animals, but return them if they could not be placed. By contrast, a Michigan city shelter reported that it had a "live release" rate of 99% of dogs and 98% of cats. Most of the animals, however, were transferred to a killing shelter, rather than adopted out. The shelter can boast of a "live release rate" of 99%, but cannot be considered No Kill given that many of the animals were killed elsewhere. In addition, some shelters transfer injured or orphaned wildlife to rehabilitation facilities and organizations. Shelters should ensure that these facilities likewise embrace a No Kill philosophy.



Does No Kill mean warehousing animals?

No Kill does not mean business as usual (poor care, hostile and abusive treatment of animals, warehousing) minus the intentional killing. It means modernizing shelter operations so that animals are well cared for, socialized daily, provided preventative and rehabilitative behavior

NO

and medical care, and kept moving through the system efficiently and effectively and into loving, new homes. Indeed, about 1,000,000 people now live in communities where the municipal shelter places at least 98% of the animals (about 10,000,000 live in communities where they place at least 90% and many of those save above 95%) thanks to a successful and comprehensive adoption strategy.

At one No Kill animal control shelter, the average length of stay for animals was eight days,

the shelter had a return rate of less than two percent, it reduced the disease rate by 90 percent from the prior administration and the killing rate by 75 percent, even while operating at capacity. Dogs were exercised four times per day, cats got out of the kennel at least two times per day, and no animal ever celebrated an anniversary in the facility. It also rehomed the rabbits, hamsters, gerbils, and all other species of shelter animals, all while operating in a manner consistent with the definition of No Kill provided herein.

ARE THERE COMMUNITIES THAT CAN BE LOOKED TO FOR GUIDANCE?

YES

Visit saving90.org which highlights communities with live release rates in excess of 90%, including many above 98%.



EMBRACING An Inevitable Future

AT the No Kill Advocacy Center, we come by the definition and guiding principles within this guide through several means: evidence, analysis, an awareness of how far the sheltering industry has progressed over the last decade, and an unequivocal commitment to the highest ideals of the animal protection movement. Nonetheless, we recognize that some of what we advocate involves discussions that many do not want to have. They will argue that the definition and guiding principles are premature and would be more politically convenient to embrace at a later date, when more or most communities are achieving live release rates above 95%. In other words, they will claim that we are setting the bar too high.

We disagree. Much of what our organization has advocated over the past decade was also greeted with admonition and

decried as impossible but has since been adopted by hundreds of shelters and organizations nationwide, including some of the largest in the nation. There is no reason to assume that further innovation will not likewise receive the same eventual acceptance. Second, and more importantly, it is our duty to do so. With animal shelters throughout the nation claiming to be “No Kill” while simultaneously killing animals who are not irremediably suffering, ignoring the plight of these animals by allowing such shelters to claim success short of the actual goal line means animals not only needlessly lose their lives, but that we risk embodying the very things the No Kill movement was founded to combat: the stagnation and complacency with killing that characterized generations of shelter leaders following the industry’s founding.

The animals still being killed matter just as much as those who no longer face death, and for many of them, such as behaviorally challenged dogs, our duty is compounded by the fact that we—as humans—are often responsible for their condition through our neglect, abuse, and undersocialization. Relieving us of that burden by killing such animals does not result in redress for them.

This view does not mean we deny that some communities currently face infrastructure, legal, and other impediments to saving all these animals at this time, but rather that we do not allow such current limitations to hinder our vision, to stop us from setting aspirational goals and continually striving to improve the care of the animals served by working to overcome those obstacles. Indeed, the underpinning of the No Kill philosophy is that it goes beyond what is commonly assumed to be a practical necessity by focusing on what is morally right. It is, first and foremost, a movement of beliefs, of ethics, of what our vision of compassion is now and for the future. Its success is a result of a philosophy prompting us to do better; to embrace more progressive, life-affirming methods of sheltering that address the needs of animals still falling through the safety net of care. Failing to admit to the existence of such gaps means the impetus to eliminate them simply disappears.

Before many of us within the No Kill movement felt comfortable with the answer to questions of whether or not “feral” cats suffered on the street and whether or not No Kill was possible, we had already rejected mass killing. We had rejected

practical explanations based on a “too many animals, not enough homes” calculus, or that a death was preferable to indeterminate future suffering. Even though early in the No Kill movement’s history, though the practical alternative of the No Kill Equation was yet unknown, the movement still recognized that whatever practical explanations there were to “justify” it, the killing was still wrong and had to be rejected. Moreover, calculations which elevate expediency over what is right are generally inaccurate and historically, have been used to excuse atrocities. Ethics will always trump the practical and the two are seldom so inexorably linked that an untoward action must follow some fixed practical imperative.

Every action taken by animal advocates must be subservient to preserving life, a principle that not only puts our movement in line with the successful rights-based movements that have come before ours, but is a philosophy that fosters the motivation necessary for us to figure out how we can bring our aspirations into reality. That is the job and duty of the animal protection movement, not—*as it has historically done*—to justify or enable the killing of animals with tired maxims that are not subjected to rigorous analysis.

A better and ethically consistent future in animal sheltering inevitably awaits us if the No Kill movement can continue to do what it has always done until every last animal entering our nation’s shelters—whatever the species, whatever the challenge—no longer faces killing: overcome the flawed but mutable traditions we have inherited from prior generations. The sooner we recognize the need for change and further innovation, the sooner we will find the motivation and tools to bring that brighter future into reality.



6114 La Salle Ave. #837, Oakland, CA 94611
facebook.com/nokilladvocacycenter
nokilladvocacycenter.org