

# Care or Control?

By Ed Boks

**A**fter 20 years of working in both the animal welfare and control fields, I came to assume, as I suspect many do, that there are two distinct schools of thought or discipline in our industry, with more differences than commonalities. These two distinct methodologies have come to be known as humane/animal welfare programs and animal control programs. Usually, these two methodologies are contrasted with each other. An unintended consequence of contrasting these two programs is that over the years something of an animosity seems to have developed between these two branches of the same tree.

Thanks to such organizations as the National Animal Control Association (NACA), the American Humane Association (AHA), the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS), the Society of Animal Welfare Administrators (SAWA), the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA) and, of course, Best Friends Animal Sanctuary, much of this animosity has substantially subsided in recent years. The two schools of thought slowly learned from each other that there are more similarities between our separate missions than there are differences.

The recent societal awakening to the realities of the human/animal bond and the intrinsic value of all living creatures has given birth to a national movement called



“no-kill.” Although the values espoused by this new movement offer nothing new to most of us in the animal control field, it is ironic that the term “no-kill” seems to offend so many of my colleagues in that field.

I submit that we in the animal control field should not shun or resent this new movement. On the contrary, we should embrace it. This movement belongs to us as much as it belongs to anyone. No-kill is nothing more than a manifestation of our own industry’s evolution from regulatory rabies control programs to progressive animal care and control programs, with an ancillary rabies-monitoring component. Just as we were successful in substantially reducing the risk of rabies in our communities, so I believe we can be key players in substantially reducing the euthanasia of healthy adoptable pets.

Who can honestly argue with the concept of “no-kill”? Yes, we humanely euthanize animals because we are unable to adopt them all. But isn’t the vision of no-kill what we all work for each and every day? Imagine for a moment the day when your organization won’t have to humanely euthanize another healthy adoptable animal. Don’t tell me no-kill isn’t our vision too!

Let me tell you what we’re doing in Maricopa County, Arizona. Maricopa County Animal Care and Control Services (ACCS)

owns the no-kill movement in our community. ACCS takes a back seat to no one when it comes to achieving no-kill. In October 1999, ACCS opened the first municipal no-kill shelter in the United States. This community center has a “get acquainted” park that gives prospective adopters the opportunity to play with and get to know an animal they may make a part of their family. The Pet Adoption Center offers dog obedience and agility training classes because we believe that when new adopters take the time to develop a deep and satisfying bond with their new pet, they will be less likely to return the pet to a shelter at a later date. In addition to licensing, we will soon microchip every animal we adopt to doubly ensure the animal is returned home should it find its way back to our shelters.

Our Pet Adoption Center has truly become a community center, and our community has responded. Our adoption rate has jumped 23% since opening the center one year ago. We adopted over 17,480 pets into loving homes during this time – more animals, we think, than any municipal shelter program in the United States. This program demonstrates that when citizens are provided a pleasant, guilt-free environment in which to select a pet, they will enthusiastically respond.

So excited are the residents of our community about animal control’s embrace of the no-kill movement that a whole new, and heretofore untapped, revenue stream has developed. Donations! Local foundations and citizens immediately rallied in support of our efforts. Hundreds of thousands of dollars in donations and grants flowed into ACCS once the community understood we were giving more than just lip service to this new concept called no-kill.

ACCS is currently developing a Shelter Medicine Program. Animals that historically were euthanized at the time of impound because of illness or injuries are now treated and adopted. For instance, recently a pit bull hit by a train required a leg and its tail be amputated. It also required considerable mending from deep lacerations. Citizens across the state wrote essays explaining why they should be allowed to adopt this animal.

A comprehensive Foster Program allows time for sucklings and sick animals to become healthy enough to be adopted. A New Hope Program has created partnerships with over 50 local rescue and no-kill organizations, allowing them to adopt animals from our euthanasia list at no cost. ACCS even provides a free one-year license that can be transferred to adopters when these organizations finally place these animals with families.

ACCS works very closely with our local veterinary association. We are currently developing the structure for a low-income spay/neuter program similar to the New Hampshire program. This program helped reduced New Hampshire’s euthanasia rate by 70% over several years. The state of Minnesota found that every \$1 invested in such a program resulted in a \$19 savings in animal control costs over a 10-year period.

This new program will complement ACCS’ current program of neutering every animal prior to adoption. Since beginning this program in 1995, Maricopa County’s euthanasia rate fell from 20 animals per 1,000 residents to 11 animals per 1,000 residents.

ACCS has taken a leadership role in forming a local Maddie’s Coalition. I’m disturbed when I hear that animal control

programs are reticent to get involved in such efforts in their communities because “Maddie’s Fund won’t give any money to our organizations.” We have got to stop thinking in terms of “our organizations” and start thinking in terms of our communities.

When you think in terms of community, you will find that your animal control program is uniquely positioned to own your local no-kill movement. Let me explain. With all due respect to all the local no-kill shelters in America today, their reach is limited. Please, don’t misunderstand – I applaud and appreciate all the no-kill organizations. But there is a big difference between a 3,000-square-foot no-kill shelter and a 9,000 square-mile no-kill county. Animal control programs can effectively raise the vision of no-kill to a community initiative.

Maricopa County comprises 9,200 square miles containing 24 of the fastest growing cities and towns in the United States, home to three million residents. Our vision is to create a no-kill community in which every citizen not only understands the no-kill ethic but also participates in achieving this goal.

But to truly become a no-kill community requires every local humane society, animal welfare, rescue and no-kill organization to marshal their resources to assist the one organization where the killing occurs.

Our challenge is not to just participate in, or even coordinate, a community-based no-kill initiative. Those of us in animal control should take the lead! Animal control is where the killing occurs. Who really wants to end it more than we do? Our organizations provide the only real measure

against which all the humane societies, animal welfare, no-kill and rescue organizations can even begin to determine their effectiveness. I humbly submit that before any donor or grantor gives \$1 to any local humane/animal welfare organization, they should investigate what that organization does to reduce the killing in our animal control shelters.

As community leaders, we must rise above the rhetoric of “us versus them.” All local organizations must roll up their sleeves and apply their resources where they will make a difference. Albert Einstein defined insanity as doing the same thing over and over again, but expecting different results. I believe no-kill is an achievable goal. But it won’t occur if our animal control and animal welfare organizations continue to do business as usual. No-kill is achievable only if we work together to implement bold new strategies and interventions that get results.

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