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The motivation for no-kill shelters

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It is a common misconception that we must kill dogs and cats for want of homes. We think it's common sense: Lots of animals, not enough homes, some (millions) must die. Of course, this is what we're told, and few of us have thought to actually look into the facts behind that story.

ough homes. It is usually bureaucracy and resistance to change that maintain the myth or those shelters across the country that are stuck in the rut of euthanasia, staff and squandered on fund-raising and grant-writing instead of adoption.

Shelter r But this i and into
nsist that we need to raise money to take care of the dogs and cats imprisoned there. rt before the horse. Our first priority should be getting dogs and cats out of the shelter

Our second priority should be preventing the structural problems that make them homeless in the first place. The grant money will always be there to feed and house them, rest assured.

We need to erase the need for these services. Instead of putting our finger over the crack in the dam, let's prevent the floodwaters from rising. Let's become adoption experts instead of executioners.

The focus on money also detracts from our own personal power. In a community with high poverty rates, it really is illogical to conflate compassion for animals with signing a check. Animals are saved because we find room in our homes to adopt or foster them. Animals are saved because we spay and neuter them (low-cost programs exist in our area to relieve needy families). Animals are saved because we volunteer our time to adoption efforts and trap-neuter-release. Animals are saved because we stop eating them. All of us have the power to help animals in our own way, and it doesn't always mean paying someone else to do it for us.

This is not to say our shelters are always terrible, evil places. To the contrary, the people staffing them usually care deeply. Some operate Facebook pages to advertise animals in need and recruit volunteers. They offer some low-cost veterinary services to the community. The shelter animals are also represented in community events.

But there are a lot of things that must change. Healthy dogs and cats are killed regularly. Stray cats are killed instead of humanely trapped, neutered and released. (Feral cats aren't homeless; the outside is their home.) Most facilities aren't open as often as they should be, and when they are, it is often during times when everyone is at work.

Many are mistakenly under the impression that their community shelter is no-kill, but for many shelters in our region, that certainly isn't the case. It should be, though. I encourage everyone who cares about the well-being of other animals to adopt or foster if they can. Volunteers are also needed to help find homes or keep shelters open longer hours. Follow your local shelter on Facebook and share every post about a dog or cat in need (social networking is how many animals are saved). Support local trap-neuter-release programs. And while you're at it, consider the animals on your plate as well; they'd also appreciate your help.

Anyone interested in learning more about how the no-kill system works can check out "Redemption" by Nathan Winograd. He also has a website with additional resources.

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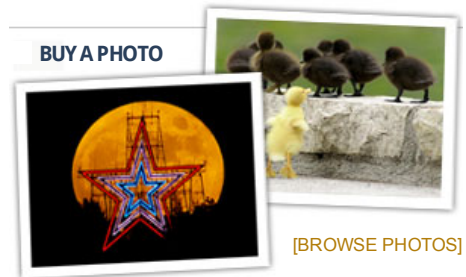
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