

To Kill or Not To Kill... that's no longer the question



► By Michael Mountain

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Nobody who works at an animal shelter or humane society wants to kill the animals who are brought to them. Humane workers only do it because they see no alternative.

The no-kill movement began as an attempt to bring some relief, not only to the animals, but to the people trying to deal with this seemingly insoluble problem.

Best Friends, for example, grew out of a group of friends, back in the 1970s, who used to go to our small local humane society once a month to adopt as many as possible of the animals who would otherwise have to be killed.

Back then, we could never take home enough to bring an end to the monthly killings altogether. But it was better than doing nothing. We could certainly nurse lots of the animals back to health, give them some simple house training, and find new homes for them.

The idea that we might somehow be in competition with those dear ladies at the humane society never remotely crossed anyone's mind – ours or theirs. They were doing what they could to help the animals, and we were doing what we could to help them help the animals.

Not every community has enjoyed a good relationship between no-kill shelters and humane societies. The plight of animals can be so overwhelming that sometimes the only relief is to take your sense of helplessness out on someone else.

While some humane societies have been able to adopt a no-kill approach themselves, in other cases festering sores and raw wounds have developed between the traditional humane societies and the fast-growing no-kill movement.

For any organization to accuse another of being the cause of the animals suffering can strike a wound that's very difficult to



heal. It's also, for the most part, untrue. The reason the animals are homeless is perfectly straightforward: their families abandoned them.

In the final analysis, then, all of us who care about the animals are part of the no-kill movement. We all want the killing to stop. And the opportunity is now truly within our grasp.

Several more major cities across the nation have recently set plans in motion toward the goal of No More Homeless Pets. They include New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, San Diego, and Las Vegas.

For communities that have the will but lack the means, the cavalry is now on the horizon in the form of Maddie's Fund, a \$200 million foundation that will be offering substantial grants for well-organized, cooperative, local spay/neuter and adoption programs.

Still, we live in a shallow, throwaway society. Latest studies indicate that most homeless pets are abandoned by people in their thirties who are moving house or changing their lifestyle – searching, perhaps for more meaning, depth, or love in their lives. If only they knew!

Changing attitudes like these will take more than grants and programs. But that's where you and I can help. All major social advances are led by people who care enough to set the right example.

We can start by adopting homeless animals ourselves, making them part of our family, and taking good care of them.

And we can set an example of living by the Golden Rule in our own lives, treating others, both people and animals, as we ourselves would want to be treated.

We'll not only be helping to guarantee a good home for every dog or cat who is ever born. We'll also be setting a cornerstone of love for the new millennium. 🐾