



Teacher Newsletter of The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals



Animal Shelters 411

Like the animals in their care and the communities they serve, animal shelters come in all shapes and sizes. Some concentrate on rescue and adoptions, some on spaying and neutering and others focus on education and raising awareness of the welfare of animals. Regardless of their make-up, the mission of all shelters is to help animals in need. Unfortunately, misconceptions abound about shelters and the work they do especially among children. As educators, you can help shelters help animals by debunking these myths and clarifying the important role shelters play in communities.

What are shelters and who operates them?

Shelters are usually operated by either a municipality or a non-profit organization. Any shelter can use the term "Humane Society" or "SPCA" in their name. These are generic terms that don't imply that the shelter is part of a larger organization or has special powers. In fact, most humane societies and SPCAs are independent of each other. SPCA stands for Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, as in the "ASPCA" which stands for the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.

Municipal shelters are usually operated by the city or county governments. They employ animal control officers whose job it is to enforce animal-related laws. Although municipal shelters receive money from local governments, most are underfunded, and accept donations to help them care for the animals.

Non-municipal shelters are often called private shelters. Private shelters are run by non-profit organizations and are mainly funded by donations. The ASPCA is not a municipal shelter, but our humane law enforcement agents are empowered to investigate and make arrests in all types of animal cruelty cases within New York State. We rely on donations to fight animal cruelty.

Within the private shelter community are limited-access facilities, often referred to as "no-kill" shelters. These facilities accept a limited number of animals based on

species, age, health, adoptability and space. Once they are at maximum capacity, a limited-access shelter will not take in more animals and will only euthanize animals that are severely aggressive or suffering.

The amount and types of services a shelter provides depends on its resources. Animals may be given medical exams and vaccinations. They may undergo a behavior evaluation to determine what their personality is like and with what kind of family the animal would do best. Some shelters spay or neuter their animals before they are adopted. Some shelters place the burden on the adopters, requiring them to have the animal spayed or neutered by a veterinarian.

Adoption programs match animals with responsible, suitable families. A shelter's adoption policies are designed to ensure prospective adopters are able to provide a suitable home and care for a pet for his or her lifetime. Potential adopters are often asked to consider several questions before adopting: Why are you adopting a pet? How many people live in your household? Can you afford to care for a pet? Are pets allowed in your home or apartment? What will be the living arrangements for the pet? Though these questions may seem intrusive, shelter workers want what is best for both the animals and the adopters.