

Euthanasia Needs to Be Put Down

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Are you a cat person, a dog person, or both? Whatever answer you choose, I imagine you still would give either one a pat on the head when given the chance. Unfortunately, animal homelessness is a big problem for many reasons. The overcrowding of animal shelters resulting from this will end in the euthanasia of over fifty percent of dogs and cats in traditional animal shelters (American Humane, 2016). Euthanasia rates are so high in traditional shelters because of overcrowding, animal homelessness, irresponsible pet ownership, and lack of resources. Most traditional shelters are left with no choice but to euthanize the animals who have been there for long periods of time to protect their mental health and make room for incoming animals. This is considered the best course of action because it prevents more animals from living on the street, which also results in reduced overpopulation. Accordingly, no-kill shelters are on the rise, but they still have their own set of issues for the same reasons traditional shelters do. It is our responsibility to help these animals, and the best ways to do so are spaying and neutering our pets and providing the resources for shelters to do so as well. Volunteering and becoming a foster home for pets will also provide more food, shelter, and love for animals in need. You can also make sure that you are being a responsible pet owner by keeping track of your pet, whether manually or with a microchip. Lastly, adopting from shelters is the number one way to help save other animals. If you can, adopt, don't shop. No-kill shelters are the best way to save animals from unnecessary euthanasia and give them the chance to find a new, loving family.

In 1866, the first U.S. animal shelter was founded by The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, and in 1944, The North Shore Animal League and Dog Protective Association, Inc. in Long Island dedicated itself to the no-kill philosophy. Over 1 million cats and dogs have been saved since its founding (Moore, 2021). The key difference between the two types of animal shelters is that no-kill shelters euthanasia rates are below ten

percent, and traditional shelters euthanasia rate depends on how much room they have.

Traditional shelters are required to take in any animal if they have the space for it. When these shelters get full, they begin to euthanize animals to make room for new ones and to preserve the mental health of animals that have been there for too long. Shockingly, “Animals do not spend months and years in cages waiting to be adopted. If they are not adopted in a given amount of time, they are euthanized” (Sencer, 2017). When these shelters are at full capacity, they turn away some animals to try to reduce the mortality rate. The American Humane Society (2016) determined that fifty-six percent of dogs and seventy-one percent of cats were euthanized after entering shelters. This is due mostly to overcrowding. There are many reasons why shelters are overcrowded, including irresponsible pet ownership, lack of volunteers, irresponsible breeders, and more. On the other hand, instead of euthanizing animals who have been in the shelter for too long, no-kill shelters reserve euthanasia for sick, old, or aggressive animals. “A shelter that follows these practices will generally save more than 90 percent of the animals it takes in” (Toback, n.d.).

The experience of euthanizing a pet is a devastating one, but in most cases, it is necessary. Whether your pet is simply old, sick, or aggressive, euthanasia is an essential part of the continuous well-being of an animal. This is why no-kill shelters still euthanize animals that fall under those conditions. “Depending on the layout of the shelter, the longer an animal stays isolated in a cage the more it harms its mental health. Traditional shelters are considered humane because they euthanize animals that have been in their shelter for a long time and that are likely to be in poor mental states” (Sencer, 2017). As heartbreaking as it is, some animals need an out. This is why I don’t think euthanasia is bad at its core. It is much better to let an animal pass peacefully than to watch it suffer and pass of its own accord. This, in part, is one reason that traditional shelters euthanize animals who have been there for too long. In my opinion, no-kill

shelters handle euthanasia in the most humane way possible. They leave the option there for animals that really need it, but they don't overuse it and let the animals that don't need it have another chance to find a home. Unfortunately, not all people value animal life as highly. This lack of empathy is part of the reason some animals need to find a home in an animal shelter.

An essential part of caring for animals is being a responsible pet owner and keeping track of your pets. You can do this by microchipping, supervising outdoor activity, and making sure your pet has tags. Many animals in shelters are people's pets who have been lost. Astoundingly, only 15% of animals in shelters are reunited with their owners (American Humane, 2016). As a dog owner myself, I make sure my dog is always wearing a collar with a family member's name, phone number, and address when we leave the house. Bertie, my cocker spaniel, has a big fenced-in yard to play in, and she is supervised every now and then. Of course, accidents happen, and some pets are stinkers. That's why it is also important to microchip your pet if it's within your budget and you feel comfortable doing so. When an animal is picked up at a shelter they are always checked for tags and microchips. This is a vital way that animals can be returned to their owners if lost.

The heartbreaking reality is that there are many homeless animals living on the street. So many animals that shelters simply cannot take them all in. This is one of the reasons that traditional shelters euthanize as many animals as they do. One of the main causes of animal homelessness is unspayed and unneutered animals. An unspayed or unneutered animal and its offspring can produce between 50,000 and 500,000 babies in just seven years (The Woof, 2019). Many pet owners cannot afford these procedures, and many are also ill informed of the benefits of spaying/neutering your pet. This is why in 1973, the ASPCA began the "Low-Cost Spay/Neuter program" (Moore, 2021). This program provides affordable spaying/neutering procedures for adopted cats and dogs. But homeless animals and house pets are not the only

culprits. “Backyard breeding” and Puppy mills are some of the worst offenders. Pet owners will breed their pets without being well informed and not considering the ethics of backyard breeding. While puppy mills are “notorious for prioritizing profit over the well-being of animals” (The Woof, 2019). To combat unethical breeding and overpopulation, affordable and accessible resources must be provided for pet owners and animal shelters alike. The Low-Cost Spay/Neuter program is a great option for those in its reach.

Another valuable resource for animal shelters is volunteers and fosters. Many traditional animal shelters “often partner with foster programs and pet stores in an attempt to increase adoptions for their animals” (Sencer, 2017). By volunteering your time and resources, you can help overcrowded and overwhelmed animal shelters. All you need to do is search for your local animal shelter then call or use their website to see what opportunities they have for you to help out. You can also donate money or other resources if you don’t have the time to volunteer or foster. Some animal shelters rely on donations, volunteers, and fosters. In “Animal Shelters and the No-Kill Movement” Andrea Toback (n.d.), Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc.’s, executive director of human resources, writes, “Because municipal shelters are generally under the administration of a large department, they tend to get the short end of both funding and staffing [...] Additionally, these shelters may be staffed by friends and relatives of political appointees. Such people may have no background in the care of animals and no sense of duty to the animals” (Toback). Volunteering, donating, and fostering helps promote the well-being of these animals and even helps them find a home. I have always wanted to volunteer at an animal shelter but was too afraid I would become too attached to one, or many, of the animals there. However, your help could save an animal, which is worth it.

To summarize, euthanasia is necessary, but there are many alternatives that boil down to empathy, responsibility, and taking care of your community. Whether or not you can sacrifice

your time or money at an animal shelter, you can hold yourself accountable if you are a pet owner and do your part in helping animals across the country. No-kill shelters are exactly how I think euthanasia should be handled. So, I think that the question of if these shelters should exist is actually how euthanasia should be handled and how can we as a community prevent the overuse of euthanasia? As much as I love puppies and kittens, there is an animal in a shelter somewhere with a clock counting down to its euthanasia that I would like to love on.

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