

PAWS for Action – The Target is Zero
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Prevailing practices in animal welfare organizations tend to make it easy to leave animals at shelters and hard to get them out. We think this is the best way to serve our local citizens and help their animals. But is it?

Many shelters provide night drop offs for owners who want to conveniently surrender their pets after hours and not have to face the animal welfare worker. We waive surrender fees because owners tell us they can't afford to pay them. We expand our business hours to accommodate busy schedules.

On the flip side, in an effort to protect the animals we care for, shelter personnel too often assume the role of gatekeeper. We want to see these animals get the loving "forever" homes they deserve so we attempt to screen out anyone we deem less than perfect.

The end result is overcrowded shelters and increased euthanasia.

I recently met with representatives from an organization called Target Zero, which consists of a group of "getting to zero" leaders who share their combined wisdom with animal welfare workers in various cities around the country. This is a group of folks who have succeeded at getting their communities to "no-kill" status and they believe we can one day become a "no-kill" nation.

Target Zero preaches that success comes from collaboration between government and nonprofit animal welfare organizations. Together they focus on two goals: reducing shelter intakes and increasing live release rates.

These goals are reached primarily through targeted high-volume spay/neuter; open adoptions; trap-neuter-release of community cats; foster care programs; and owner surrender interventions.

Their strategies are working much faster than anticipated. About two years ago Target Zero began working with the City of Waco, TX. With a euthanasia rate of 70% it was estimated to take about five years to get below a 10% euthanasia rate. A city that has achieved at least a 90% live release is considered a "no-kill" community as there will always be some animals that are too sick, injured or aggressive to save.

Waco made the goal in less than two years and has managed to maintain a 90%+ live release rate for several months. This is in spite of a 30% poverty rate, well above the national average of 16%. There simply are no excuses for any city to fail to reach this goal if they would only try.

There is much to be optimistic about. I, for one, am certain the day will soon come when we will look back on this dark time for companion animals and humbly declare that we are a "no-kill" nation.

Bobbi Yeo lives in Opelika, AL. She is the CEO of PAWS Humane in Columbus, GA, an animal shelter and veterinary clinic offering low-cost spay/neuter and other services to the public. Email her at byeo@pawshumane.org with your comments and story ideas.