

**Sunday Column – Our mission and vision
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The most important thing you need to know about any nonprofit organization is its mission and vision. At PAWS Humane we printed our mission and vision statements on a big sheet of paper. We all signed it and placed it in our lobby for everyone to see. This is what guides everything we do.

The mission is what a nonprofit does on a day-to-day basis. The vision is what we hope to achieve. At PAWS Humane our vision is to create a no-kill community and our mission outlines five broad strategies for achieving this goal.

It is no accident that the first strategy is to provide high-volume and high quality spay/neuter. Since 2009 PAWS Humane has provided over 45,000 low-cost and free spay/neuter surgeries to the general public.

The results of this work have been astonishing. During this period, Columbus Animal Care and Control went from a high of 8,000 annual intakes to 4,000. Everywhere high volume spay/neuter is made accessible a similar outcome has been realized. It works.

The next strategy listed is rescue and adoption. Our annual adoptions have increased ever since we opened our doors, with 1,747 animals adopted in 2017. We're never content to rest on our laurels so next year our goal is 1,800. However, we look forward to the day when spay/neuter has reduced the unwanted pet population to a level where there aren't so many animals in need of a new home.

The PAWS Humane mission also includes providing volunteer opportunities. This helps us raise awareness in our community about the issues of animal welfare. Our volunteers are not only critical to completing our daily work, they are also ambassadors who talk to friends, family, co-workers, and others about our work at PAWS Humane and why we do it.

Thanks to generous grants received from the Petco Foundation and Pet Smart Charities, our community outreach has increased this year. When the Best Friends community cat project ended in September, PAWS Humane took it over without skipping a beat.

Achieving no-kill is not a realistic goal without a robust trap, neuter, and release program. Just a few years ago, the euthanasia rate for cats in Columbus was a tragic 90%. Today it is below 10% and no cats are ever euthanized for space.

Our Pets for Life program is in full swing for 2018. It entails intensive door-to-door canvassing in low-income neighborhoods where the spay/neuter rate is often less than 15% (national average is 85%). In these neighborhoods 50% - 70% of pet owners have never taken their animals to a veterinarian for anything more than a rabies vaccine, if at all.

Not surprisingly, these neighborhoods are exactly where the highest number of animal control intakes come from. If we are successful here we will end pet overpopulation.

This work is not for the faint of heart. It takes a tremendous amount of dedication, patience and effort. Those who work in these neighborhoods see animals and people in difficult circumstances but they must

be willing to keep coming back for the program to succeed. It requires a love for people as well as animals.

Education is the last strategy listed but it's certainly not the least. We have seen how non-smoking campaigns directed toward our youth have dramatically decreased the rate of smoking in adults. Our education programs follow this example by targeting school age children.

It's natural for people to keep their animals the way their parents did. It isn't always easy to convince adults that it is a good idea to spay/neuter pets before they have a litter or that pets should not be left outside when the temperatures are extreme. Introducing these ideas to youngsters will encourage them to become responsible pet owners as adults.

In the 1970s and 1980s most of us were not aware of just how many animals were dying in our nation's shelters. While the numbers have dropped significantly, shelter euthanasia remains the leading cause of death for companion animals. It is up to us to educate the public about the magnitude of the problem and how, by working together, we can fix it.

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