

**Sunday Column – It's about the animals**  
**For publication 1.28.18**

The ASPCA estimates that 1.224 million animals are rehomed by their owners every year. They found that the most common reason (46 percent) was related to the pet itself. Family problems accounted for 27 percent of relinquishments and 18 percent were due to housing issues.

As a nonprofit animal welfare organization, we often have the means to assist those who come to us to surrender a pet because of medical or behavioral issues. We will typically offer a session with our behaviorist or provide links to the many on-line resources available to resolve these types of problems. Early intervention is most effective because once a pet owner makes the difficult emotional decision to surrender it is not easily walked back.

A marriage counselor I once knew told me that by the time couples came to him for help they were beyond saving the marriage and his job became more about divorce counseling. My experience with pet relinquishment is similar. Once a family brings their pet into our building it is too late. They have disconnected emotionally and are not willing to risk the anguish of trying again and failing.

Medical problems can be a different matter. We've met pet owners who love their pets dearly and surrender them as an act of mercy when they realize they can't afford medical treatment. PAWS Humane has to turn these animals away when our shelter is full. Owners are left with the option of taking their pet to animal control where he will be the first to be euthanized when they are out of space.

Until recently, our on-site veterinary clinic offered a limited array of wellness services. It was heartbreaking to turn away pet owners who needed more than basic vaccines when we knew there was little alternative available to them. Yet every day we receive calls from desperate people with sick pets. For this reason, PAWS Humane recently expanded the menu of veterinary services we offer. We are not full service but we now can help with skin problems, heartworm treatment and dental cleanings. Our veterinary services have always been targeted to economically underserved populations. However, we don't screen clients for financial need because simply looking at gross annual income is not an accurate indicator of need.

In fact, the ASPCA found that gross annual income of \$50,000 marked the dividing line between those who could afford traditional veterinary care and those who found it necessary to either seek lower cost alternatives or surrender their pet.

We have worked through every imaginable form of income screening to help us differentiate those who "really" need help from those who don't. What we have come to realize is that regardless of how much money someone makes, each individual's circumstances are unique. They may be supporting a parent or caring for a special needs child. We explain to our callers that our services are limited, and that if they are able, they should take their pet to a traditional veterinary clinic. We trust them to make the appropriate decision in light of their own circumstances.

Charitable nonprofit organizations come into being to fill unmet needs in our communities. If we were not aware of a significant unmet need for affordable veterinary care we would not provide these services. It is consistent with our mission and our vision of creating a no-kill community in Columbus. At the end of the day, our primary responsibility is to animals in need and the people who love them.

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