

# **IMPLEMENTING THE NO-KILL EQUATION IN LOS ANGELES**

*By Ed Boks*

LA Animal Services has long been committed to making the City of Los Angeles a “no kill” community for animals. Over the past several years the Department has implemented numerous programs and policies to achieve this goal.

Recently there has been something of a buzz in the animal welfare community about a relatively new “No Kill Equation” for local government animal care and control agencies. This prescription claims to be a revolutionary formula for achieving “no-kill.” In fact, the “No-Kill Equation” is neither new nor revolutionary but is actually comprised of ten commonsense, long-standing practices embraced and implemented by LA Animal Services with remarkable results.

An animal advocate in our community recently submitted an analysis comparing the “No-Kill Equation” to LA's programs and practices. This document compares the No-Kill Equation recommendations to an outside perspective on how LA Animal Services has been addressing each recommendation for, in some cases, many years. As appropriate I also comment on specific recommendations.

## **The Ten "No-Kill Equation" Recommendations are:**

1. Feral Cat TNR Program
2. High Volume/Low-Cost Spay/Neuter
3. Rescue Groups
4. Foster Care
5. Comprehensive Adoption Program
6. Pet Retention
7. Medical and Behavioral Rehabilitation
8. Public Relations/Community Involvement
9. Volunteers
10. A Compassionate Director

**The No-Kill Equation will appear in bold font.**

*The analysis of LA Animal Services' efforts will follow in italics.*

My comments are in this font.

## **I. Feral Cat TNR Program**

**Many animal control agencies in communities throughout the United States are embracing Trap, Neuter, Return programs (TNR) to improve animal welfare, reduce death rates, and meet obligations to public welfare and neighborhood tranquility demanded by governments. In San Francisco, for example, the program was very successful, resulting in less impounds, less killing and reduced public complaints. In Tompkins County, an agreement with county officials and the rabies control division of the health department provided for TNR as an acceptable**

**complaint, nuisance and rabies abatement procedure. In specific cases, the health department paid the Tompkins County SPCA to perform TNR.**

*The Los Angeles Board of Animal Services Commissioners in 2005 embraced trap-neuter-return (TNR) as a preferred policy and the Department informally aids feral cat rescuers on a non-programmatic basis.*

*The Department has no formal TNR program yet because a proposal to change City law to officially permit such a program has been delayed by threats from environmental and wildlife organizations insisting that TNR is unacceptable. They insist that the City of Los Angeles must complete a full environmental review to show that such a program will not harm bird species and habitat despite numerous reports from respected environmental groups such as the National Audubon Society stating the real threats to bird species and habitats are urban development, habitat destruction and the effects of global warming.*

*Research and data does not support a dispositive conclusion that feral cats are responsible for species decline and the National Audubon Society supported prior state legislation, Assembly Bill 302, the "Feline Fix Bill," requiring among other things that cats permitted outdoors be spayed or neutered.*

*Nonetheless, LA Animal Services is working with the Bureau of Engineering's environmental unit to prepare appropriate documentation to comply with the California Environmental Quality Act. There may be no other locale in the United States where environmentalists have actively attempted to block TNR without either considering a compromise or offering to help design a viable program that addresses their concerns.*

*The Department prefers to form a partnership with environmental groups as done in the state of New Jersey where the Audubon Society and The Burlington County Feral Cat Initiative are working together to craft humane and environmentally friendly solutions to reduce the feral cat population. It is LA Animal Services' desire and duty to care for all of the City's animals in need and the Department is currently looking to resolve these issues as expeditiously as possible via the environmental clearance process.*

*In the meantime, LA Animal Services' North Central Spay/Neuter Clinic is currently devoted to cat sterilization. Since 2006 the Department spays or neuters over 8,000 feral cats annually independent of and in addition to any formal spay/neuter or TNR programs. There is no record of any municipality funding more feral cat surgeries annually than LA City.*

Without question, one of the biggest challenges to achieving no-kill in Los Angeles is implementing a program to effectively reduce the number of feral cats in our neighborhoods. Estimates on the feral cat population in LA are difficult to make, but they range from the tens of thousands to hundreds of thousands.

Feral cats are cats that have reverted to a wild state. They are born from tame unaltered cats that owners abandon or allow to run loose. These cats mate with other free roaming

cats, and their offspring, raised without human compassion, are wild, or feral. These cats then grow up and breed with other feral and free roaming pet cats and the cat population increases exponentially.

Communities employ one of three methodologies to deal with feral cats: 1) Do nothing, 2) Eradication, or 3) Trap/Neuter/Return.

While it is easy to understand why doing nothing has little effect on the problem, it is not as easy to understand why eradication does not work.

Although many communities employ eradication or “catch-and-kill” as a remedy to this vexing problem, 30 years of catch and kill in communities across the United States has irrefutably demonstrated that this methodology does not work.

There are very real biological reasons why catch and kill fails. Wild animals tend to be “survivors.” Feral cats, which are wild animals, typically live in colonies of 6 to 20 cats. You often never see all the cats in a colony and it is easy to underestimate the size of a feral cat problem in a neighborhood. When individuals or authorities try to catch cats for extermination it heightens the biological stress of a colony.

This stress triggers two survival mechanisms causing the cats to 1) over-breed, and 2) over-produce. That is, rather than having one litter per year of two or three kittens, a stressed female could have two or three litters a year of 6 to 9 kittens each.

Even if a person was successful in catching and removing all the feral cats from a neighborhood, that creates a phenomenon called, “the vacuum effect.”

When some or all the cats in a colony are removed, cats in surrounding neighborhoods recognize an opened ecological niche (especially a place with food sources). The removed colony actually kept surrounding colonies at bay. When a colony is removed, all deterrents evaporate and the surrounding cats enter the new territory to over-breed and over-produce, with all the associated annoying behaviors.

The end result of the catch-and-kill methodology is always the same: the vacated neighborhood quickly finds itself again overrun with feral cats fighting for mates, over-breeding, caterwauling, and spraying for territory.

Thirty years of catch-and-kill have taught us that this methodology only exacerbates the problem. It is not a solution at all.

Albert Einstein defined “insanity” as doing the same thing over and over again expecting different results. That is why so many communities are trying the newest alternative, trap/neuter/return, or TNR.

TNR is being practiced in more and more communities across the United States and around the world with amazing results.

When TNR is employed, all the feral cats in a neighborhood are trapped, sterilized, and returned to the area where they originated. They are returned under the care of a Colony Manager. The Colony Manager is a trained volunteer in the neighborhood willing to feed, water, and care for the colony and keep an eye out for any new cats. Once the colony cats are all neutered, new cats tend to be recently abandoned domestics that can be placed for adoption.

There are many benefits to TNR. 1) TNR prevents the vacuum effect from developing. 2) Altered cats display none of the troubling behaviors of intact cats: fighting and caterwauling for mates, and spraying for territory. 3) The cats continue to provide rat abatement, a service many neighborhoods rely on, and 4) because feral cats tend to live significantly shorter life spans than domestic indoor cats the problem literally solves itself through attrition, provided TNR is implemented community wide.

TNR also addresses the concern that feral cats tend to create a public nuisance on campuses and in parks. There is an old adage that says “you can’t herd cats.” In fact, you can herd neutered cats because they tend to hang around the food bowl. Because they no longer have the urge to breed and prey they tend to follow the food bowl wherever the feral cat manager takes it. Feral cats can be trained to congregate in campus or park areas out of the way of the public.

Clearly, TNR is the only viable, non-lethal, humane and cost effective solution to our communities’ feral cat problems. I look forward to the day in the not-too-distant future when Los Angeles can complete the thorough California Environmental Quality Act review required for the legalization of a formal TNR program here.

## **II. High-Volume, Low-Cost Spay/Neuter**

**Spay/neuter is the cornerstone of a successful lifesaving effort. Low cost, high volume spay/neuter will quickly lead to fewer animals entering the shelter system, allowing more resources to be allocated toward saving lives. In the 1970s, the City of Los Angeles was the first to provide municipally funded spaying and neutering for low-income pet owners in the United States. A city study found that for every dollar it was investing in the program, Los Angeles taxpayers were saving \$10 in animal control costs due to reductions in animal intakes and fewer field calls. Indeed, Los Angeles shelters were taking in half the number of animals after just the first decade of the program and killing rates in the city dropped to the lowest third per capita in the United States. This result is consistent with results in San Francisco and elsewhere.**

**Research shows that investment in programs balancing animal “care” and “control” can provide not only immediate public health and public relations benefits but also long-term financial savings to a jurisdiction. According to the International City/County Management Association, “An effective animal control program not only saves cities and counties on present costs—by protecting citizens from dangerous dogs, for example—but also helps reduce the costs of animal control in**

**the future. A city that impounds and euthanizes 4,000 animals in 2001... but does not promote spaying and neutering will probably still euthanize at least 4,000 animals a year in 2010. A city that... [institutes a subsidized spay/neuter program] will likely euthanize significantly fewer animals in 2010 and save on a host of other animal-related costs as well.**

*It is fitting and appropriate that the No-Kill Equation cites the City of Los Angeles as a national model and leader for spay/neuter initiatives. After a number of years of reduced spay and neuter activities, the Board of Animal Services Commissioners in 1998 initiated a differential cost dog license ordinance to incentivize dog guardians to spay/neuter their pets. The City Council and Mayor adopted the ordinance into law in 1999 and LA Animal Services immediately committed to substantially expanding its subsidy of spay/neuter via discount vouchers and mobile clinics. Since then, those activities have grown impressively. During the same time period, impounds have declined more than 25% and euthanasia by more than 60%, contrary to recent false assertions that L.A.'s differential licensing law has failed.*

*Today, via the Department's "Big Fix" program, approximately 45,000 subsidized spay/neuter surgeries are accomplished annually, including over 12,000 performed in fully-equipped and professionally-staffed mobile clinics operated by the nonprofit Amanda Foundation and the Sam Simon Foundation, primarily in underserved neighborhoods. The City of Los Angeles commits \$1.2 million annually to the department's spay/neuter programs. Additionally, long-dormant spay/neuter clinics in two of the City's shelters re-opened in 2007 and five more high volume City spay/neuter clinics are scheduled to open by summer 2008. LA Animal Services has been responsible for approximately half a million total surgeries so far this decade and over 85,000 surgeries since January 2006 alone. This number does not include surgeries performed independently by private veterinarians for pet guardians in the City.*

*During 2006-2007, the Department spearheaded the development of statewide legislation mandating the expansion of spay/neuter (AB 1634) and is also helping with the development of similar legislation specifically for the City of Los Angeles. LA Animal Services advocates spay/neuter as the most effective tool available to reduce the flow of homeless animals into public shelters over time and enjoys the full support of all the City's elected officials in that belief.*

While not fully embraced by all, the decision to combine all the City's disparate spay/neuter efforts into one identifiable program called "The Big Fix" in 2006 appears to have helped. Since the launch of "The Big Fix" the City's annual spay/neuter rate, which had experienced only modest increases in previous years, rose over 60%.

### **III. Rescue Groups**

**An adoption or transfer to a rescue group frees up scarce cage and kennel space, reduces expenses for feeding, cleaning, killing and carcass disposal, and improves a community's rate of lifesaving. Getting an animal out of the shelter and into an appropriate placement is important and rescue groups, as a general rule, can screen**

**adopters as well or better than many shelters. In an environment of 5,000,000 dogs and cats killed in shelters annually, there will rarely be a shortage of adoptable animals and if a rescue group is willing to take custody and care of the animal, rare is the circumstance in which they should be denied.**

*LA Animal Services recognizes and embraces the advantages provided by dedicated rescuers finding good homes for the animals in their care. LA Animal Services welcomes the participation of rescue groups and organizations and constantly strives to improve its policies and procedures to maximize the benefits of these partnerships. In 2005 the Department created the Participant Shelter program to streamline procedures for the approximately fifty rescue organizations taking animals from LA Animal Care Centers. In 2006 this program expanded to become the New Hope program, and now partners with over 125 registered rescue organizations to facilitate the rescue and adoption of thousands of animals from the shelters. Department staff provides comprehensive daily lists of available and at-risk animals, as well as urgent notifications, to these rescuers and groups, helping to facilitate nearly 6,000 live releases a year.*

The New Hope Program was implemented to eliminate all obstacles that might prevent the animals most at risk of euthanasia from being redeemed into caring, dedicated, expert hands. These animals are placed on a New Hope Alert that is sent to New Hope partners each day by email. The Alert shows a picture and description of the animals, and the Care Center location where the animal(s) can be found. The list is also available on our [website](#) and is updated hourly. In addition, New Hope Coordinators assigned to each Animal Care Center send urgent emails to partners concerning specific animals in critical need. Thanks to a vast network of rescue organizations and concerned residents these pleas can reach thousands of people in a matter of minutes.

Animals on a New Hope Alert are available to New Hope partners at no cost, and the animals are provided free spay/neuter, microchip, and vaccinations. The New Hope Program allows LA Animal Services to help organizations who rely on donations, grants, and dedicated volunteers to maximize their limited resources so they are better able to help us all achieve “No Kill”. New Hope is decidedly win/win/win for the rescue groups, for LA Animal Services, and most importantly, for the animals. New Hope is not designed to save animals from adoption, but to save animals from euthanasia.

The New Hope program has been implemented in Maricopa County, AZ, New York City and several other communities across the United States. While the program may not be perfect, it is designed to continually improve and meet the needs of any community. Thanks to the help of many New Hope partners in LA, I believe the LA New Hope program is the most collaborative and successful shelter/rescue partnership program in the United States.

In addition to the program benefits noted above, other New Hope highlights include:

New Hope Partners receive 24/7 access to all Los Angeles Animal Care Centers.

Each facility has a designated New Hope Coordinator trained to provide the very best customer service to our New Hope Partners.

New Hope Partners are able to contact each facility via special "hot lines" to let the respective New Hope Coordinator know if they can help an animal. The New Hope Coordinator is able to immediately remove the animal(s) from the New Hope Alert and then work with the partner to transfer the animal as quickly as possible to the partner organization.

When a New Hope partner needs additional time to transfer an animal they can coordinate that need with our New Hope Coordinator. When necessary, and as recourses are available, transportation of the animal may be provided by the Department for the New Hope Partners having difficulty making these arrangements themselves.

Every New Hope Partner, upon request, receives a sophisticated, yet simple-to-use software package to help them manage the animals in their care. This software was developed by [HLP Chameleon](#) and is being generously donated to our New Hope partners. This software provides the smallest to the largest rescue groups the same level of animal management functionality used by over 350 of the largest animal shelters in the United States! We are deeply grateful for HLP's continued and generous commitment to help shelters achieve no-kill.

There are two types of New Hope Alert; a Green Alert and a Red Alert. A Green Alert identifies animals not imminently at risk of euthanasia. These are animals that, in the view of the Department, are not likely to be adopted any time soon for one reason or another, such as age or medical condition. A Red Alert identifies animals that are at risk of euthanasia. New Hope partners are provided seven days to take possession of Red Alert animals, unless the health of the animal requires a more immediate response. All the benefits of the New Hope program apply to all the animals on both the Green and the Red New Hope Alert.

The New Hope program is under review even now in an effort to identify additional enhancements. For more information on our New Hope program, and to see our New Hope Alerts, please visit our website at [www.laanimalservices.com](http://www.laanimalservices.com).

#### **IV. Foster Care**

**Foster care is crucial to No Kill. Without it, saving lives is compromised. It is a low cost, and often no cost, way of increasing a shelter's capacity, improving public relations, increasing a shelter's public image, rehabilitating sick and injured or behaviorally challenged animals, and saving lives.**

**At some point in time, nearly every animal shelter feels the pinch of not having enough space. A volunteer foster program can be an ideal low-cost way to greatly increase the number of lives a shelter can save while at the same time providing an opportunity for community members to volunteer. Not only does a foster program maximize the number of animals rescued, it allows an organization to care for**

**animals who would be difficult to care for in a shelter environment—orphaned or feral kittens, sick or injured animals, or dogs needing one-on-one behavior rehabilitation. For animals who may need a break from the shelter environment, foster care provides a comfortable home setting that keeps animals happy and healthy.**

*LA Animal Services has long sought the participation of volunteer foster care providers. Since 2006 it has actively recruited new caregivers and now has a network of more than 100 foster caregivers providing care to both adult animals and neonates. Most caregivers are recruited from the community while some are Department employees. Some of these caregivers also provide unique foster care for so-called evidence animals being held while animal abuse allegations are investigated and other legal proceedings are ongoing. The Department actively encourages more volunteers to join in providing these valuable services. As a result, in 2007 LA Animal Services' foster program reduced the euthanasia rate for neonate kittens by sixty-two percent and hundreds of animals benefited from the foster care volunteers provide.*

LA Animal Services regularly fosters the following types of animals: orphaned neonates, nursing mothers, ill and injured, unattractive, and under-socialized animals. An example of an “unattractive” animal is a severely matted dog that has been shaved. The animal may not have a healthy, shiny coat that attracts adopters until he’s spent a few weeks in a foster home. This will give the animal a much greater chance of being adopted. “Under-socialized” fosters include animals that may not adjust well to a shelter environment. They may just need the comforts of a home environment, with training or socialization. After some time in foster care, these animals are perfect candidates for off-site adoption events.

Department Foster Care Givers are provided hands on foster care training and support documents, dedicated staff to assist and/or answer questions in person or by phone and email, replacement milk, bottles, nipples, regular veterinary check ups, access to emergency veterinary services, home medication as needed, flea combs, etc.

LA Animal Services’ Evidence Animal Foster Program is an innovation not found in any other community we are aware of. Animal victims of cruelty can sometimes languish in animal shelters for months awaiting adjudication of their case. The Evidence Foster Program allows these animals to recover from their traumatic experience in the warmth of a loving family home.

## **V. Comprehensive Adoption Programs**

**Adoptions are vital to an agency’s lifesaving mission. The quantity and quality of shelter adoptions is in shelter management’s hands, making lifesaving a direct function of shelter policies and practice.**

**As one commentator put it, “if each pet lives 10 years, on average, and the number of homes grows at the same rate that homes are lost through deaths and other attrition, then replacement homes would become available each year for more than**

**twice as many dog and slightly more cats than enter shelters. Since the inventory of pet-owning homes is growing, not just holding even, adoption could in theory replace all population control killing right now—if the animals and potential adopters were better introduced.”**

**In fact, studies show people get their dogs from shelters only 15% of the time overall, and less than 10% of the time for cats. If shelters better promoted their animals and had adoption programs responsive to the needs of the community, they could increase the number of homes available and replace population control killing with adoptions. In other words, shelter killing is more a function of market share, than “public irresponsibility.” Contrary to conventional wisdom, shelters can adopt their way out of killing.**

*LA Animal Services' animal care centers have always strived to increase adoptions and have done so every consecutive year for the past six years. As the new and expanded facilities continue to open as targeted during 2008, they will be among the most inviting animal adoption environments in the nation. Even prior to the opening of all of the new or expanded, environmentally-sustainable facilities, the work of dedicated shelter staff and volunteers working in the Department's existing shelters and at mobile adoption events have made it possible for LA Animal Services to adopt out or release to rescuers more animals than any other municipal shelter system in the U.S in 2007.*

*LA Animal Services has operated mobile adoption events since the late 1990s and continues to hold five to ten or more such events every month in locations all around Los Angeles, in addition to speaking engagements and information distribution regarding adoption at community events. Department volunteers work with staff to accomplish these activities and also engage in follow-up marketing of the animals that are not adopted from the mobile events. The Department's goal is to substantially increase the number of these mobile adoptions and outreach efforts in the coming years.*

*While the "No Kill Equation" asserts a largely unsubstantiated theory (especially in large public shelter systems) that “shelters can adopt their way out of killing,” the reality is that as long as people fail or refuse to spay and neuter their pets, treat their pets as disposable and relinquish them to shelters or abandon them in the streets, favor specific purebred animals over mixed breeds and thus continue to buy animals from breeders and pet stores, there will always tend to be more pets than adoptive homes to care for them.*

The "No Kill Equation" chooses to blame shelters and their directors for the fact that animals show up in shelters, are not always adopted, and sometimes are euthanized. This is comparable to excoriating a doctor for the fact that he or she has patients. To be sure, the doctor can and should be held accountable for how he treats those patients once they arrive, but it's not his or her fault that the patient got sick or injured in the first place.

A variety of factors come into play and, yes, one of them is irresponsible pet guardianship. Some guardians simply refuse to have their animals sterilized and let them run loose, where they can breed in an uncontrolled manner. Others willfully breed their

animals thinking they can make a few bucks selling puppies and kittens. Shelter directors and the entities that employ them can, and have, used every method available to them to try and persuade people to behave otherwise, but some will never change. To insist otherwise is to be naïve and counterproductive.

That is why the push for No-Kill must include focus on all the factors and influences that contribute to the flow of homeless animals into the shelters, from the need for more spay/neuter, to backyard breeding and puppy mills, to dog fighting and more. If we don't include these as part of our collective focus, we'll find ourselves perpetually frustrated by what seems like an inability to truly get to the root of the problems.

To achieve No-Kill requires communities to both stem pet overpopulation and build robust pet adoption programs. It is not either/or, it is decidedly both. I have managed the three largest pet adoption agencies in the United States, and I can assure you that the "Equation's" contention that shelters can "adopt their way out of the killing" reveals only a naïveté. To focus only on pet adoption is like running on a treadmill expecting foolishly to reach some distant destination.

Indeed, tactical programs (like Adoption and New Hope) are important, but without strategic programs (like Big Fix, FELIX, Safety Net, and legislation like AB 1634) shelters are doomed to be gathering places for our communities' lost and unwanted pets. We must rise above the simplistic solutions of the so-called "No-Kill Equation" and implement multi-focused strategies to effectively end pet euthanasia as a method of pet overpopulation control.

## **VI. Pet Retention**

**While some of the reasons animals are surrendered to shelters are unavoidable, others can be prevented—but only if shelters are willing to work with people to help them solve their problems. Saving all healthy and treatable pets requires communities to develop innovative strategies for keeping people and their companion animals together. And the more a community sees its shelter(s) as a place to turn for advice and assistance, the easier this job will be. Animal control agencies can maintain “libraries” of pet care and behavior fact sheets in the shelter and on a website. Articles in local papers, radio and television spots all provide opportunities to feature topics like solving litter box avoidance and excessive barking. Other pet retention programs include free in-home dog behavior problem-solving by volunteers, low-cost dog training, pet friendly rental programs, dog walker referrals, and pet behavior classes.**

*LA Animal Services' volunteers regularly provides behavioral training classes in new exercise yards built into the newly opening animal care centers and at the South Los Angeles Animal Care Center Annex. The most sophisticated volunteers augment staff in counseling pet owners and would-be adopters whenever feasible and receive training to enable them to engage in relinquishment counseling. Informational flyers on various pet behavior topics and a variety of animal issues are available in each shelter and on the Department's informative website, and popular humane community publications*

*featuring information on services and products pet owners can use to enhance their pet guardianship experience are also available free of charge at the centers. When available, donated pet food and pet toys are given to new owners when they're adopting from LA Animal Services. In addition, LA Animal Services volunteers and staff routinely provide training and grooming services to dogs in the shelters to make relinquished pets more attractive and adoptable.*

Roughly 35% of all pets taken in by LA Animal Services are relinquished by their guardians. To meet this reality, the department is developing and slowly implementing a program called "Safety-Net". The program is identifying and bringing together all the resources available in our community that can help pets and people stay together. Often pets are relinquished for reasons that seem out of the control of a pet guardian, such as a death or serious illness in the family, or an eviction or job termination. In many of these cases pet guardians just need time to sort through the difficulty. If given the option and opportunity to keep their pet they will indeed choose to retain their pet. Safety-Net will make these resources available on our website, in our Animal Care Centers, and in our Call Center so that they are made readily available to those in need.

Safety-Net will require a great deal of organizational and community infrastructure to support it, but such programs have been successfully implemented in several communities across the United States. We are confident Safety-Net LA will be a tremendous help to frantic guardians who are really only looking for some compassionate assistance to work through a very difficult time in their lives and the lives of their pets. Safety-Net will be a welcome change from the condemnation that is all too often ignorantly leveled against pet relinquishers simply looking for help.

## **VII. Medical and Behavior Rehabilitation**

**A shelter begins helping treatable animals by closely analyzing statistics. How many animals entering a shelter are treatable? What types of injuries and illnesses are most common? The answers to these questions will determine what types of rehabilitation programs are needed and how to effectively allocate resources. For example, one community may have many underage kittens in its shelters. Another may have substantial numbers of cats with upper respiratory infections, or dogs with kennel cough. Yet another may find that a large portion of treatables are dogs with behavior problems. Each will need a different lifesaving program.**

**These can include creating a fund dedicated solely to medical and behavioral rehabilitation. Such a fund lets the public direct their donations and allows a shelter to demonstrate what they are doing to help treatables. In addition, the shelter can establish relationships to have local veterinarians come to the shelter to do rotations. These veterinarians can supplement the work of a staff veterinarian and veterinary technicians and help diagnose animals, give vaccinations, and administer medication and treatment.**

**A relationship with a veterinary college can allow veterinary students to volunteer at the shelter on a regular basis, providing the students with real life on-the-job**

**training, while shelter animals receive high-quality care under the direction of the veterinary college faculty. Finally, it is impossible to overstate the importance of a foster program for underaged kittens and puppies, undersocialized animals, and those recovering from medical treatment.**

*LA Animal Services has long provided in-house and contract medical services to the animals in its care. Its new facilities feature modern, fully-equipped medical clinics and medical wards and the Department is reinvigorating its in-house veterinary team with compassionate, highly-qualified veterinary professionals. These efforts will substantially expand its ability to provide a full range of medical services, including emergency care, surgeries and disease control programs.*

*By the end of fiscal year 2008, there will be seven such clinics in the system, staffed by a total of at least seven veterinarians and over two dozen veterinary technicians (most of whom are fully-accredited veterinarians in other countries seeking the same status here while they work for the Department). Additionally, the Department routinely contracts with dozens of outside veterinarians to provide both preventive and remedial care for thousands of animals a year.*

*The Department has established a relationship with Los Angeles Pierce College to provide internship opportunities for pre-veterinary students and is negotiating with Western University veterinary school to create a formal internship program that will augment care in the shelters and introduce future veterinarians to the practice of shelter medicine.*

*Since 1987, the Department has maintained the [Animal Welfare Trust Fund](#) to be used to underwrite medical expenses for animals requiring special treatment. The Department has established a network of professional behavioral trainers to work on a voluntary basis with dogs who are nervous or scared and can mistakenly appear aggressive when entering unfamiliar shelters, to ease their stay and enhance their adoptability. Scheduled sessions are held at various animal care centers along with individualized training programs for specific animals on an ad hoc basis.*

LA Animal Services is a data-driven department. Data creates the link between assessment, planning, and results. Data-driven animal care and control agencies design targeted programs based on their shelter intake data. For example, in LA, data is used to develop and implement a multi-pronged sterilization program to ensure adopted shelter animals are sterilized prior to release, free or low-cost spay/neutering services are available for the pets of our needy, senior and disabled populations, and that cat specific sterilization programs are accessible.

In the drive to achieve No-Kill there are two commonly recognized hurdles to clear. A community's progress towards No-Kill will usually stall at the first hurdle which is typically found when its pet euthanasia rate is reduced to between 12 and 10 shelter killings per 1000 human residents annually ([12.5 is the current national average](#)). Once a community achieves this rate, further significant reductions are stalled and require the

implementation of aggressive spay/neuter programs to achieve further euthanasia reduction goals. With effective, targeted spay/neuter programs, progress to the second hurdle can be fairly quick.

The first hurdle becomes apparent after a community has successfully persuaded all the people who are likely to fix their pets to do so. The challenge then is to persuade the more difficult populations, which include the poor, the elderly on fixed income, individuals with negative attitudes about spay/neuter, people who speak languages other than English, and those who live in relatively remote areas.

To break through this first barrier, LA Animal Services developed [free and low-cost spay/neuter](#) programs for our community's needy pet guardians, and free spay/neuter for the pets of our low income [senior citizens and disabled residents](#), as well as [cat specific spay/neuter programs](#). These programs account for over 45,000 spay/neuter surgeries annually.

[Animal People](#) magazine conducted a survey in 1994 that found transportation problems represent 40% of the total reasons why pets are not fixed, equal to monetary considerations. This data suggests that providing spay/neuter transportation is an often overlooked strategy to a community's breaking through the 10 shelter killings per 1,000 humans barrier. LA Animal Services has used this data to provide over 12,000 [mobile spay/neuter surgeries](#) annually throughout the City's underserved areas by partnering with the Amanda and Sam Simon Foundations.

The second hurdle in the drive to achieve No-Kill has been characterized by [Peter Marsh](#), (founder of Solutions to Overpopulation of Pets - STOP), as "the wall". [Few communities](#) have been able to break through "the wall". A community hits "the wall" when it reduces its pet euthanasia rate to between five and 2.5 shelter killings per 1000 human residents annually ([LA City is at 4.3](#) as of June 07 and 3.75 as of the end of calendar year 2007). Hitting "the wall" tells a community that it has come to the point where most of the animals dying in its shelters are irremediably suffering due to sickness or injury, demonstrate dangerously aggressive behavior, or are feral or neonate cats, or pit bulls. Hitting the wall reveals the success of an earlier generation of effectively targeted programs.

To break through "the wall" requires a new generation of programs to address the needs of special populations not met by earlier programs. The paradigm remains the same: comprehensive data collection, assessment, and implementation of programs targeted to meet the special needs of residual populations. Breaking through the wall requires taking the information-based targeting approach to the next level.

As a result, the Department is focusing its efforts on saving these at-risk animal populations. The feral cat/neonate kitten side of the equation is fairly straight forward and can often be handled through volunteer programs. However, to be successful, it does require a significant amount of volunteer time and dedication coupled with meaningful animal care and control support. LA Animal Services is fortunate to have such an army of

life saving volunteers and employees staffing robust neonate/foster care programs, as explained in [Part IV](#) of this series. We are also working hard to make Trap/Neuter/Return (TNR) a mainstream methodology for controlling feral cat populations in LA, as explained in [Part I](#) of this series.

The pit bull side of the equation is more difficult. According to [Animal People](#) magazine, San Francisco is currently the only major city in the US experiencing a decline in pit bulls. San Francisco credits local pit bull-targeted spay/neuter legislation for this decline, which may largely be the case. However, other factors may also contribute to this decline. For instance, it is much more difficult for dogfighters and backyard breeders to go underground in San Francisco compared to most other cities. It has been said that a dog can't bark in San Francisco without 100 neighbors complaining, while a hundred dogs can bark in parts of Los Angeles and not be heard above the noise of the freeways.

LA Animal Services' volunteer trainers provide much in the way of good citizenship dog training for pit bulls and other breeds. LA Animal Services adopts out more pit bulls than any other dog breed. In addition to our neonate, feral cat, and pit bull strategies, LA Animal Services is also aggressively working to save as many treatable animals as possible.

The "[Animal Welfare Trust Fund](#)" supports the Department's [STAR](#) (Special Treatment And Recovery) Program. Many animals come into our care centers healthy and eager to be reunited with their families, or to find new families. Sadly, we also receive many sweet and loving animals that have been injured, abused, neglected, or have an illness that requires extensive treatment. When an animal is not irremediably suffering and will respond to treatment, we undertake all measures we can to make that animal healthy again. The [STAR](#) program showcases some of these STAR animals in need on our [website](#). Treatments may take weeks or months, require special medicines, or involve one or more complicated surgeries — all at an expense that exceeds the Department's usual budget allotment. The public can help these animals with [donations](#) to our LA Animal Services' STAR Program, which is used exclusively to pay for special veterinary services on animals with surgery or special treatment needs.

Thanks to our STAR program and a newly assembled, highly competent and compassionate medical team, LA Animal Services for the first time ever has the capacity to treat many animals that historically would have been euthanized or outsourced to private veterinarians. Today our staff veterinarians remove tumors, treat pyometra, repair hernias, perform dentistry, treat animals with intravenous fluids, non-narcotic, non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs), and narcotic pain-relieving drugs, and through the use of our state of the art digital X-ray machines, they are able to successfully mend fractures, and so much more.

As is the case in any hospital, attempts at life saving treatments are not always successful and these efforts have predictably resulted in a higher mortality rate than occurred when we did little to nothing to help these animals before euthanizing them. But to focus on the Department's mortality rate alone is to miss the larger point that not only is our

euthanasia rate at an all time low, the overall death rate is also moving downward.

Fewer animals are dying in Los Angeles today than at any other time since statistics were first kept. Thanks to the outpouring of public support for LA Animals Services that resulted in the City's \$160 million investment in new animal care centers equipped with modern clinics and isolation and holding wards, animals in need can now receive care for longer durations as they recover and await adoption or as explained in [Part IV](#) of this series, they may be placed in our [Foster Program](#) until they recover.

LA Animal Services has veterinarians familiar with clinical behavioral medicine who strive to help find solutions to behaviorally-challenged pets before and after entry into the animal care centers.

LA Animal Services understands that to break through "the wall" will require remedial programs as well as preventive ones, such as training programs for dogs with behavioral issues, foster care for neonatal kittens, veterinary care for injured or sick animals, etc. While preventive programs can get you to "the wall", they alone can't get you through it. Its going to take all of us working together to break through the wall and make LA the first major metropolitan No-Kill city in the United States.

For an example of a "new generation" program designed to help break through "the wall" read this LA Times article entitled, "[LAPD enlists feral cats for rat patrol](#)".

## **VIII. Public Relations/Community Involvement**

**Rebuilding a relationship with the community starts with redefining oneself as a "pet rescue" agency. The community must see improvement at the shelter, and improvements in the area of lifesaving. Public contact with the agency must include good customer service, more adoptions, and tangible commitments to give the shelter the tools it needs to do the job humanely. Public contact, however, is not necessarily a face-to-face encounter. The public has contact with an agency by reading about it in the newspaper, seeing volunteers adopting animals at a local shopping mall, or hearing the Executive Director promoting spay/neuter on the radio. It means public relations and community education.**

**The importance of good public relations cannot be overstated. Good, consistent public relations are the key to getting more money, more volunteers, more adoptions, and more community goodwill. Indeed, if lifesaving is considered the destination, public relations are the vehicle which will get a shelter there. Without it, the shelter will always be struggling with animals, finances, and community recognition.**

**Increasing adoptions, maximizing donations, recruiting volunteers and partnering with community agencies comes down to one thing: increasing the shelter's exposure. And that means consistent marketing and public relations. Public relations and marketing are the foundation of all a shelter's activities and their success. To do all these things well, the shelter must be in the public eye.**

**Indeed, a survey of more than 200 animal control agencies, conducted by a graduate student at the University of Pennsylvania College of Veterinary Medicine, found that “community engagement” was one of the key factors in those agencies who have managed to reduce killing and increase lifesaving. One agency noted that “public buy-in is crucial for long-term improvements” placing primary importance on “the need to view community outreach and public engagement as integral to the agency’s overall purpose and programs rather than simply as an add-on accomplished with a few public service announcements...”**

*LA Animal Services has aggressively pursued opportunities to publicize and promote its animals, services and activities. In October 2007, the Department received authorization to establish a new, full-time public relations staff position to formalize this effort and enhance its ability to promote its animals and activities. Additionally, the Department has utilized outside public relations professionals to good effect to market special events and adoptable animals over the past two years. The citizen Animal Services Commission provides a unique forum for public dialogue with the Department regarding policies and operations that are integral to the welfare of the animals, and provides opportunities for rescuers, volunteers and the general public to regularly communicate with the Commission and Department at its bimonthly meetings.*

*LA Animal Services' animals are regularly seen on local television newscasts. Department staff routinely discuss spay/neuter, pet adoption, animal cruelty prevention and other important topics on local television and radio and in local newspapers, as well as meet with neighborhood councils, associations and other organizations to discuss these issues. The pending re-establishment of an in-house public relations staff for the first time since 2005 is intended to enhance the Department’s ability to communicate with both the media and the public.*

LA Animal Services is receiving a lot of positive feedback to the "No-Kill Equation" series from people around the City and the country who were not aware of the effective programs and remarkable progress LA is making in transforming itself into the nation's most humane city.

This feedback points to a significant departmental need, the expert staff to help effectively tell our compelling story. LA Animal Services is one of the largest and most effective animal rescue organizations in the nation, rescuing between 100 and 200 lost and homeless animals everyday. Many of these animals are rescued from abusive or neglectful situations and are either sick or injured. As a department we are so focused on helping the hundreds of animals in our care at any given moment that we have not always been as successful in sharing these remarkable life saving stories with the community.

That will all change in several ways in 2008, some of which I am not at liberty to share right now, but there is one change I can share. LA Animal Services is now actively recruiting to fill a Public Relations Specialist position. The Department has been unable to fill a public relations position since 2005 and we are eager to fill it for all the reasons

stated above.

The City of Los Angeles launched their animal department nearly a century ago as a humane program. LA Animal Services is the true successor to that humane vision, with our emphasis on re-uniting lost pets with owners, helping people adopt new family pets, enforcing laws that keep animals and people safe, and educating the public about responsible pet ownership and co-existing with wildlife.

## **IX. Volunteers**

**Volunteers are a dedicated “army of compassion” and the backbone of a successful No Kill effort. There is never enough staff, never enough dollars to hire more staff, and always more needs than paid human resources. That is where volunteers come in and make the difference between success and failure and, for the animals, life and death.**

**In San Francisco, a community of approximately 800,000 people, volunteers spend over 110,000 hours at the shelter each year. Assuming the prevailing hourly wage, payroll taxes and benefits, it would cost the San Francisco SPCA over \$1 million dollars annually to provide those services. In Tompkins County, a community of about 100,000 people, volunteers spend over 12,500 hours walking dogs, grooming cats, helping with adoptions, and doing routine but necessary office work, at a cost savings of approximately \$85,000 if the SPCA were to pay for those services at the entry level hourly rate.**

**The purpose of a volunteer program is to help a shelter help the animals. It is crucial to have procedures and goals in mind as part of the program. In Tompkins County, for example, the agency required all dogs available for adoption to get out of kennel socialization four times per day. This could not be accomplished by staff alone and therefore volunteers were recruited, trained and scheduled for specific shifts that would allow the agency to meet those goals. It became quickly apparent that having volunteers come in whenever they wanted did not serve those goals and so all volunteers were given instructions and a specific schedule.**

*LA Animal Services’ 1,076 active volunteers contributed over 150,500 hours in 2007 in a wide variety of tasks, including shelter clean-up, grooming, dog walking, rabbit exercising, adoption assistance and counseling, assisting staff at mobile adoptions, community information booths and special events, and other valuable tasks.*

*According to Independent Sector, a nonprofit, nonpartisan coalition of approximately 575 charities, foundations, and corporate philanthropy programs, collectively representing tens of thousands of charitable groups in every state across the nation, the 2006 estimate for the value of a volunteer hour in California is \$20.36 per hour. The 2007 value estimate will be released this spring.*

*Independent Sector calculates the hourly value of volunteer time based on the average hourly wage for all non-management, non-agriculture workers as determined by the*

*Bureau of Labor Statistics, with a 12 percent increase to estimate for fringe benefits.*

*Using Independent Sector's 2006 calculation for California, LA Animal Services estimates that its volunteers conservatively donated well over three million dollars worth of volunteer service in caring for the animals in its six Animal Care Centers in 2007.*

*Volunteers have always been a vital and valued part of LA Animal Services' work and the volunteer program formalized with the creation of Volunteers in Service to Animals (VSA) in the 1970s. VSA disbanded in the 1990s and was replaced by an official Department volunteer program headed by an on-staff volunteer coordinator. The overall volunteer program was reviewed during 2007 and recommendations for refinements are forthcoming. The recommendations are expected to focus on improving the volunteer experience and resolving issues that arise between volunteers and staff. A new volunteer coordinator is expected to join the staff early in 2008, filling a void that has existed for much of 2007. This addition will strengthen the program by restoring direct management oversight to a network of hard-working animal care center-based volunteer coordinators. Recruitment of new volunteers is ongoing and will be a priority for the new volunteer coordinator.*

## **X. A Compassionate Director**

**The final element of the No Kill equation is the most important of all, without which all other elements are thwarted—a hard working, compassionate animal control or shelter director not content to regurgitate tired clichés or hide behind the myth of “too many animals, not enough homes.” Unfortunately, this one is also oftentimes the hardest one to demand and find.**

**But it is clear—as better than a decade of success in San Francisco, Tompkins County, and now elsewhere demonstrates—that No Kill is simply not achievable without rigorous implementation of each and every one of these programs and services. It is up to us in the humane movement to demand them of our local shelters, and no longer to settle for illusory excuses and smokescreens shelters often put up in order to avoid implementing them.**

*LA Animal Services' current General Manager Ed Boks, hired in January 2006, is a retired pastor and former organizational development consultant. Boks brings a unique blend of management competencies to the Department, including more than three decades of animal welfare experience where he successfully introduced and implemented No Kill principles and programs as described in the "No-Kill Equation" in two of the largest animal care and control programs in the United States, Maricopa County, Arizona and New York City.*

*While in Maricopa County and New York City Boks received numerous awards and recognitions for his "groundbreaking work to introduce his No-Kill mission..., educate and involve the community, and protect the lives of lost and homeless pets now and for years to come."*

*Boks is nationally recognized by such organizations as In Defense of Animals (IDA) who presented him with a lifetime achievement award for “an extraordinary life of kindness, compassion, commitment and achievement dedicated to ending homelessness and for providing compassionate care for homeless animals.” Alley Cat Alliance recognized Boks for his “vision and foresight to recognize TNR as the effective, ethical solution to feral cat overpopulation.”*

*His compassionate philosophy and programs have been profiled in USA Today, The New York Times, The New York Post, The Los Angeles Times, The Arizona Republic, and Newsweek, Best Friends, and Cat Fancy magazines.*

*During Boks' tenure in Los Angeles he has been recognized by Fred Bergendorff's The Pet Place television show for "coming to the aid of animals and in doing so displaying selfless acts of courage, heroism and compassion" and by Voice For The Animals Foundation for his leadership role in "protecting the welfare of animals" through the Los Angeles Animal Cruelty Task Force.*

*Boks demonstrably possesses the knowledge and experience to guide LA Animal Services in the No Kill direction and has actively promoted a philosophy comparable to that expressed in the “No Kill Equation” for many years.*

*Boks brought in a new human resources team to institute vigorous performance review and disciplinary procedures consistent with City requirements that the Department had not consistently followed for many years prior to 2006. Training in a variety of skills and information areas is being offered to staff on a regular basis. “Secret shoppers” visit the animal care centers and critique conditions, customer service, signage and other aspects of operations to aid management in fine-tuning those operations and upgrading staff performance.*

*The Department’s veterinary team has been completely reconstituted and its management and administrative teams re-structured, rebuilt and reinvigorated. Additionally, the Department is systematically pursuing legislative amendments to improve its ability to promote adoptions and retention, fight animal cruelty and illegal animal sales, and address other issues of concern to the humane community and pertinent to the pursuit of its No Kill goal.*

*Since coming to Los Angeles Boks has applied his expertise to feral cat issues, spay/neuter issues, rescue groups and foster care programs, adoption and pet retention efforts, medical and behavioral rehabilitation, public relations and community involvement. The Department continues to progress via increasing adoptions and reducing euthanasia since his arrival. In fact, in 2007 under Boks' leadership the Department achieved it’s most significant decrease in euthanasia in any one-year period - 22%, which confers upon the City of LA one of the lowest euthanasia rates in the nation.*

Messages from Books on Compassion:

Enlarging the Circle of Compassion

If You Meet Buddha on the Road

Compassion: Our Last Great Hope