

The Shelter Patchwork

An estimated 100,000 animals are turned over to public South Carolina animal shelters each year, and this number is growing. Despite the efforts of shelters with aggressive adoption programs, the vast majority of these animals are euthanized. The numbers nationally are just as staggering.

In South Carolina, animal shelters exist within a patchwork of municipal and county-based organizations, regional or specialized non-profit efforts, or combinations thereof. In some counties, animal control (and shelter operation) is a municipal or county department. In other counties, it is included within the sanitation department or public safety unit. Elsewhere, non-profit organizations (such as the Animal Mission) support a local public shelter or non-profit organizations run the shelter (as in Spartanburg). Add to this mix non-profit organizations that specialize in care for specific animal breeds or animal types.

A number of self-proclaimed "no kill," non-profit shelters also exist in South Carolina. Some of these do an excellent job handling animals and planning appropriate adoptions (especially those with spay/neuter requirements for adoptions as called for in state law). Others, unfortunately, put individual pet survival ahead of long-term considerations. They do not spay/neuter adoptive animals and/or encourage "on-the-spot" curbside animal adoptions.

All shelter operations, no matter their size or purview, are extremely limited in their ability to find suitable homes for all the animals needing adoption. Public shelters must use euthanasia to keep up with the outpouring of unwanted and lost animals. They do not have the option of being selective of which animals they take in. And most public shelters using euthanasia are moving aggressively to increase their adoption programs and lost and found capabilities to reduce the need for euthanasia. "No kill" shelters, on the other hand, can limit animals coming into the finite confines of their programs. These animals may require long-term confinement because of the inherent difficulty and expense of finding suitable homes for them. There is no one or easy solution to the problem of too many pets, too few homes.

In South Carolina, all hands are welcome in the effort to manage the overflow of lost, abandoned and unwanted animals into the system. There is a role for everyone. Including you!

And here lies a huge need. Very few shelter personnel in private or public shelters, government animal control, or humane organizations have access to professional training. This lack of training hurts these organizations' abilities to professionally manage animals coming into the system. The skill and knowledge needs are wide-ranging: proper and humane euthanasia training, animal handling procedures, modern shelter operation, pet registration, public health issues, breed information, and programs for spay/neuter, adoption, and lost and found.

The South Carolina Animal Care and Control Association (SCACCA) is working to answer this need for training. SCACCA is the professional organization made up of approximately 80 shelters and humane organizations across our state.

In the 2001 legislative session, SCACCA sought state financial support for minimal training and professional standards that can be made available to all shelters (regardless of operating philosophy), animal control organizations and humane

groups. This establishment of minimal standards and money for training will go far to address a huge and growing need in South Carolina to better prepare those we entrust to handle our animals.

To help, e-mail SCACCA via the Animal Mission if you are interested in this organization or in supporting their legislative efforts.

-The Board of the Animal Mission, 2001