

Good Homes for All!

The experts give their top tips

The first Best Friends No More Homeless Pets conference was held in Virginia Beach in May.

Three hundred and thirty-six people who are building No More Homeless Pets programs, mostly in the east coast states, gathered for three days to learn some of the latest tips, best advice, and most recent experiences from the men and women who are on the cutting edge of the No-Kill movement across the country.

Here are some top tips from all the presenters.

Bringing the Community Together

You can certainly make a difference working on your own, but if you want to make sweeping changes for the animals, you've got to be able to work together with other local groups.

That's often easier said than done. We all share the same goals, but people who care about animals are, by nature, individualists, often with very different views of what's best for the animals. (The old argument between traditional shelters and no-kill groups is a classic example of this.) Trying to build a strong coalition of humane groups often just brings these differences to the surface. So what do you do?

Don't set out to "bring everyone together" in an overall way. Instead, focus on specific goals – like joint adoption days or a spay/neuter program – and bring together the people who can help make that happen.

Ed Boks added that in Phoenix, Arizona, rather than trying to put together a single coalition, they have several different ones all operating at the same time to accomplish different goals.

Things that build coalitions:

- Listening – really listening! – to what other people have to say.
- Cooperating with others, rather than trying to get them to cooperate with you.
- Focusing on common goals that you can achieve together.
- Sharing the credit.



"In New Hampshire, our initial coalition meetings were "like endless group therapy sessions" with nothing getting accomplished. Then suddenly we were confronted with some pro-trapping legislation. We all banded together, dropping our differences in order to fight the trappers, and we won!"

*Peter Marsh, Esq., Founder,
Solutions to Overpopulation
of Pets, Concord, NH*

Things that destroy coalitions:

- Wanting to have it all your way.
- Bad-mouthing other members of the group.
- Focusing on irrelevant overall philosophy.

Dealing with Active Naysayers

"That all sounds great, BUT what do you do if one of the main humane groups in your community just doesn't want to work with the others?"

Don't get bogged down trying to get uncooperative people on board. Move on and do what you can with the people who do want to work together. When the naysayers see you succeeding, they'll probably join in. (Remember to be gracious when they do!)

"An even bigger BUT: What if a big humane group is publicly working against you and bad mouthing you?"

If necessary, go to the court of public opinion. Don't get into a public argument, but make your case in an appealing and pithy way.



"When we were confronted by an organization that thought it was better ("kinder," as they put it) to kill feral (alley) cats than care for them, we went public with a simple slogan: Better fed than dead! This cut right through all the arguing and silenced the opposition."

*Nathan Winograd, Esq.,
Executive Director, Tompkins
County SPCA, Ithaca, NY*

Don't judge people by their appearance

"It was the middle of the spring kitten season when I worked at the San Francisco SPCA, and we were all maxed out with kittens everywhere when this guy and gal with tattoos and body piercings all over them came in with three newborn kittens they'd just found.

"I was desperate, so I just said to the guy, thinking he'd never be able to do it, "Look, it's easy! Here's what you do: You feed him like this ... You help him to poop like this ... Then in eight weeks, bring them back here and we'll find them homes."

"In eight weeks, the guy shows up with the three kittens – all fluffy, healthy, and playful – and says he wants to adopt one of them and turns the other two over to the society."

Nathan Winograd



"If they want a pet and they can't get one from you, do you think they're just going to go home with their tail between their legs? Of course not! They're going to head straight for the nearest pet store."

Mike Arms, President,
Helen Woodward Animal Center,
Rancho Santa Fe, CA

Finding Homes for Homeless Pets

"Don't fight human nature," says Mike Arms.

Top adoption expert Mike Arms says that much of his advice boils down to a simple bottom line: Work with human nature, not against it.

Arms has taken many of the sacred cows of the humane movement and stood them on their heads — like the old saw that says you shouldn't allow people to adopt animals during the holiday season.

Most people who want to adopt a pet are trying to do the right thing. So work with them. Help them do the right thing. Stay in touch with them. Educate them on good pet care.

Arms's Home for the Holidays program began in San Diego in 1999. During the six-week event, 2,563 dogs and cats were adopted at 14 San Diego animal shelters.

Last year, Arms invited organizations in California, Utah, New Mexico, Texas, and Washington State to participate. One hundred and thirty shelters participated and over 19,101 animals found homes through the 2000 Home for the Holidays program. (The goal was 15,000.)

This year Arms is inviting shelters across the country to participate, with the goal of finding homes for over 180,000 orphans.

Other Top Adoption Tips

Hold super-adoption days. Invite several or all of the other local groups to bring their animals. Give the day or weekend lots of promotion.

Setting basic ground rules (like every adopted pet must be fixed) is good. But don't try to micromanage every group's adoption procedures.

Rather than setting super-stringent adoption policies (and treating your "customers" as though they're the enemy!) give people good information and make it easy for them to do the right thing.

Take the animals to where the people are. In Salt Lake City, the No More Homeless Pets program opened an adoption center in an upscale mall. (The mall donated the space.) Furburbia, as it is

"The most valuable information I gained was when Mike Arms said to always have two kittens in a cage and give them names like Bonnie and Clyde. I know this will increase my kitten adoptions."

— One of the attendees

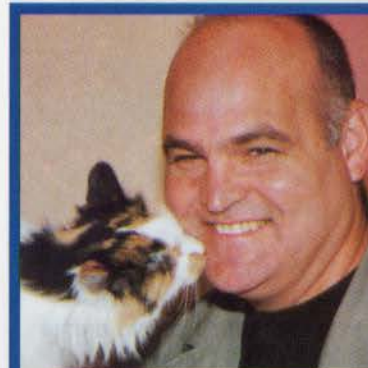
known, is billed as "the hip place to find true love." It's a fun, cheerful adoption center, designed to go head to head with pet stores. Local humane and rescue groups can all bring animals to be adopted, and Furburbia provides the setting for, on average, 25 adoptions every week.

In Phoenix, Ed Boks's Scratch and Sniff Mobile Adoption Van takes adoptable pets out to the suburbs for the day so that people don't have to come to an old shelter and see animals in a drab setting. He also opened the first municipal (animal control) no-kill adoption center to offer an easy and friendly environment where people can come to see and adopt animals.

And, obviously, always have the animals looking their best and use all the available marketing and promotion techniques to place them in the best homes you can find.

Spay/Neuter Funding

The core of a No More Homeless Pets program is spay/neuter. No matter how many animals you find homes for, you will never get on top of the problem unless people are getting their pets fixed. Low-cost spay/neuter programs often break down because the necessary funds to subsidize the program can't be found. So here are some tips from the panel.



"Vets are well respected by their clients and therefore uniquely positioned to deliver the message about spay/neuter (and behavioral advice, too) to keep animals in homes."

Paul Berry,
National Community
Programs Director,
Best Friends Animal Sanctuary

Working with your local government

You can get public funding for spay/neuter programs that work. But you need to show your city, county, or state how their investment will save money.

Show them the bottom line. The state of Minnesota was delighted to become involved in spay/neuter funding when legislators discovered that every \$1 in



"The media are your friend. Create media excitement and opportunities. We've even had skydivers dressed up as cats and dogs, and a school marching band, to draw media attention to our events."

Julie Castle, Campaign Manager,
No More Homeless Pets in Utah



"We in the animal control field should not shun or resent the new no-kill movement. On the contrary, we should embrace it. This movement belongs to us as much as it belongs to anyone."

Ed Boks, Director, Maricopa County Animal Care & Control Services, Phoenix, AZ

Working with veterinarians

If you want to gain the cooperation of veterinarians, start by cooperating with them. Vets are not charitable organizations. So approach them with a reasonable business proposal and keep up your end of the bargain.

Don't expect them to organize your program for you. Make it easy for them by making the arrangements, handling all the calls, and scheduling the surgeries. Then the vet can simply do what he or she does best: spay/neuter the animals.

Establish clear lines of communication. Designate one person from your group or coalition as your contact person for the vets. Invite or hire a veterinarian to act as a liaison with the other vets you are trying to recruit. (This is especially helpful if you are hoping to get vets involved in approaches that may be new to them, like early-age spay/neuter or working with feral cats.)

Working with Animal Control

Traditionally, animal control was the city or county agency, often a branch of health or sanitation services, that was primarily responsible for keeping the streets free of stray dogs and cats.

But, like everything else in the new world of animal care, this is rap-

idly changing. A growing number of animal control officers are stepping forward to help move their community toward no-kill.

New Hampshire has a publicly funded low-income spay/neuter program that has reduced shelter deaths by 90% since the program was put into place ten years ago.

How do you approach officials for funding? Go as a coalition. If you want public money, you have to present a united front. A coalition of veterinarians and humane groups stands a far better chance of getting public funding than does a single small animal welfare organization.



"Always look for ways to create opportunities for other organizations. I like super adoption days because they're a great way of bringing lots of groups together and helping them all have a big success.

Before the day is over, you've built an instant coalition without ever mentioning the word!"

*Francis Battista,
Director of Animal Care,
Best Friends Animal Sanctuary*

idly changing. A growing number of animal control officers are stepping forward to help move their community toward no-kill.

Involving the animal control department in your efforts to help the animals is critical, since in most cases they care for the largest number of animals.

To make contact, call your animal control director and schedule a visit to your city or county shelter. Nothing takes the place of a friendly face and a listening ear. Many animal control officers feel wrongly judged, so be sure they know that you are not there to gain ammunition against them but to learn from them and to help.

Some of the ways you may be able to help the local shelter include: finding volunteers, getting things they need donated, finding homes for the animals, getting positive media coverage for the shelter and the animals there, and inviting animal control to participate in special events and spay/neuter programs.

Caring for Feral Cats

On the day the conference began, Becky Robinson of Alley Cat Allies arrived walking a foot off the ground. She had just signed a contract with military officials to manage a feral cat care program at the Norfolk Shipyard in Virginia. This came after months of protests by local groups, and meetings and negotiations with naval base managers.

When the base officials signed the agreement, they said that if they had it to do all over again, they would have invited Alley Cat Allies in for a meeting right at the beginning. "We did not realize the power of you animal people!" remarked one of the officials.

To work successfully with the military, or indeed officials from any large institution (colleges, corporations, even condominiums), you need to remain calm and respectful. Provide them with clear written information and supporting documentation. And really listen to their concerns and address them.

If necessary, to get the ear of the decision makers, take your issue to the public, your member of Congress or the legislature, and, of course, the media. (The media were always on hand to cover the protests at the naval shipyard – especially when they heard that a rule had been issued forbidding cat care groups to feed the feral cats.) 🐾

The conference was organized by Bonney Brown of Best Friends Animal Sanctuary and hosted by Tidewater Animal Rescue. A West Coast conference will be held in Seattle, Washington, in October.



"Hundreds of local programs to spay/neuter feral cats and then care for them where they live have sprung up across the country. So now we need officials and policy makers to work with feral cat caregivers to protect the cats' lives."

*Becky Robinson – National
Director of Alley Cat Allies,
Washington DC.*

From the Q & A Session

How do we get more men involved in the animal welfare movement?

Julie Castle: Once we get guys to come and volunteer once, the ladies make such a fuss over them and they have such a great time, they keep coming back!

I'm not a group. I'm just one person. What can I do to make a difference when I return to my community?

Paul Berry: Visit the shelters and organizations in your community. Ask questions. Find out what they're doing and what they need. Find out how many animals they're taking in and how many they're finding homes for. Once you know what the situation is, you'll know what you can do to help.

We're a military community (college town, etc.), where families are suddenly transferred (or students move on) and they can't or won't take their pets with them.

Nathan Winograd: Consider turning their situation into a positive one. Create a foster care program in cooperation with the military (or school, etc.) so that these folks can enjoy sharing their home with pets while they're there and then, without guilt, return them to the care of the humane society when they leave.

How do you avoid burn out?

Everyone on the panel laughed. You can't! Don't avoid it; embrace it! But, at least, try to leave some time for yourself.

Our local shelter will not allow any volunteers and won't work with local rescue groups. They say this is for liability reasons.

Ed Boks: Animal control shelters can use liability waivers. The city or county attorney can create one for them. So I suspect they may have other reasons. (Other panelists suggested that if the objections cannot be overcome through discussion, take the matter to elected officials or the media.)

How can we bring the no-kill movement into the larger animal rights movement that's working to protect farm animals, stop vivisection, ban circuses that use animals, as well as protecting wildlife and the oceans?

Michael Mountain: I'd put the question the other way around because No More Homeless Pets is the key to success for the animal rights movement overall.

If you want people to care about animals in the oceans and the forests and the laboratories and the factory farms, then the best place to start is to help those same people do right by the animals that are part of their own family, living in their own homes or on their own streets. Like all charity, caring about animals begins at home.



*Michael Mountain, President,
Best Friends Animal Sanctuary*

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