



SHELTER ZONE by: BRIGID WASSON on JUNE 1, 2013

Collaboration Saves Lives

Maddie's Fund Helps Animal Shelters Work Together to Create a No-Kill Nation

The San Francisco Bay Area is a highly desirable place to live so there is a large and growing population of both human and companion animal residents. Unfortunately, many of these animals will end up in shelters due to being lost, abandoned, or surrendered by their owners. In Santa Clara County alone, over 28,000 dogs and cats enter shelters each year. In the past, these agencies – run by city, county, or private nonprofit organizations – operated independently and had few cooperative efforts, which led to low adoption and reclaim rates. As a result, many animals were euthanized.

Shelter leaders in our community recognized the need for improvement, and in 2004 representatives from the six agencies in Santa Clara County – Palo Alto Animal Services, Silicon Valley Animal Control Authority, Humane Society Silicon Valley, San Jose Animal Care and Services, Town Cats, and County of Santa Clara Animal Care and Control – started meeting to discuss ways of doing that. In 2008 we enlisted the help of Maddie's Fund, a family foundation started by the founder of Workday and PeopleSoft, Dave Duffield and his wife, Cheryl.

Since 1999 Maddie's Fund has awarded over \$118 million to animal welfare agencies and schools of veterinary medicine that are working toward a no-kill nation. Maddie's Fund provided guidance and structure to the forming of our coalition, dubbed WeCARE (Community Alliance to Reduce Euthanasia) in 2011. Maddie's Fund offered the incentive of the Community Lifesaving Award, which acknowledges outstanding contributions being made by communities that have implemented an adoption guarantee for all healthy shelter pets. By focusing our efforts we were able to make this accomplishment in 2011, and in 2012 our coalition received the \$1.04 million award.

Thanks to our combined efforts, life is now much better for shelter animals in Santa Clara County. Through low or no cost spay/neuter, we prevent thousands of unwanted animals from being born. Through food banks and reduced-cost medical care, we prevent many pets from being surrendered. Our lost pet prevention and recovery program (see Bay Woof Shelter Zone, March 2012) helps keep animals out of shelters through low or no cost ID tagging and microchipping, and helps lost pets return home through owner assistance and education. Transfer of animals between shelters increases adoptions; for example, herding dogs are more likely to be adopted in rural areas while little dogs are more likely to be adopted in city areas. Shared pet adoption venues bring animals out into the communities where they will meet potential adopters who may never visit a shelter.

With almost half a million pet-owning households in Santa Clara County today, there should be little trouble placing all healthy shelter pets... right? Unfortunately not, as studies show that only 25% of people wanting a new dog or cat will adopt from a shelter. So in order to reach out to our community and encourage people to adopt instead of buy, we created an awareness campaign called Shelters First. This campaign promotes the human-animal bond and creates a positive feeling about animal shelters.

People may choose not to adopt because they think animal shelters are sad, shelter animals are inferior, or the adoption process is difficult. Shelters First replaces those negative ideas with positive ones, using uplifting words and images on our website and Facebook page. We did our first TV campaign featuring available dogs and cats in late 2012 with KOFY-TV 20 and continue to promote our message in 2013: When you're ready for your next companion animal, think Shelters First!

One great collaborative effort is our joint adoption events where all six shelters agree to the same date, theme, adoption fee (or no fee), and other details. This proves to be very convenient for potential adopters. Our most successful event so far has been Home for the Holidays. Held during the month of December, it promotes the idea that pets should spend the holidays in a loving forever home, not a shelter. Two years in a row we have exceeded our adoption goals, with over 1,200 animals finding new homes in 2012!

This year we were invited to participate in America's biggest free adoption event, Maddie's® Pet Adoption Days. Held on Saturday and Sunday, June 1-2, this event includes over 200 shelters and rescue groups in five states. Dog and cat adoptions are free to qualified adopters, and for each adoption the shelter or rescue will receive a stipend of \$500-\$2,000 from Maddie's Fund.

This year, Maddie's Fund wants to find homes for 5,000 animals during the two-day event by expanding the geographical boundaries to reach 11 million more people. You can help make that goal a reality by adopting a pet during Maddie's Pet Adoption Days. Visit adopt.maddiesfund.org for more information and a list of participating shelters and rescue groups. Most of the shelters will be extending their normal business hours that weekend, so check their websites or call before visiting.

Brigid Wasson is the Animal Shelter Supervisor for the County of Santa Clara. The shelter is located at 12370 Murphy Ave. in San Martin and is open Monday-Friday from 12-6 and Saturday-Sunday from 12-5, closed on major holidays. To learn more about the shelter, view adoptable pets, or make a donation, visit www.sccountypets.org or call 408-686-3900. For links to all shelters in the WeCARE coalition, visit www.sheltersfirst.org.

Main article photo by: courtesy Santa Clara County Animal Shelter

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