



Blinded by Compassion

How idealism & misguided compassion is killing millions of homeless pets



Listen up...

Every year, **millions** of cats and dogs enter pet rescues and shelters in the United States.

Over 56% dogs and puppies entering shelters are euthanized every year.

An estimated **4 million** cats and dogs are euthanized every year.

That's approximately 1 death every
8 seconds.

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How idealism is killing millions of animals
And 25 things that can help save them

By Andrew Grant

Imagine you were just given \$15,000 along with the option to use the money to either save the life of one animal or hundreds of animals. The answer is obvious. You'll use the money to save many. Now imagine a cute little puppy being placed into your arms as it's revealed she is in urgent need of a \$15,000 surgery in order to walk and live. Has your decision changed? Pet rescues across the country are confronted with agonizing choices like that everyday. Their choice and the consequences of that decision will surprise you. More on that later.

Over the last several years, I've had the very unique opportunity to tour dozens of large pet rescues, while meeting with directors, as I worked on a project to raise money for and bring awareness to pet rescues across the country. During that time, I saw countless homeless pets, met some extraordinary people managing very effective organizations, but also encountered many poorly managed facilities. The experience was overwhelming, perplexing, inspiring and frustrating all at once.

I decided to share some of my experiences, observations and a few ideas in an effort to start a discussion and an exchange of ideas. Many of my criticisms and recommendations are harsh and they'll certainly anger many who will be quick to label me as being insensitive, uncompassionate and worse. I simply don't care. My only goal is to raise questions, identify problems, offer solutions and prompt meaningful change to save animals.



> **First things first**

1. Step one. Plug the leak

Every day our social media feeds are flooded a stream of heartbreaking photos and stories about rescue animals in need of help. It's a clear indication that Americans care deeply about animals. Yet every year, millions of cats and dogs, enter shelters in America and only a small percentage of them are adopted. The fate of the rest is heartbreaking. The result is that every eight seconds an animal is euthanized in America. We, as a country, need to address some very delicate issues, answer some difficult questions, create and implement effective policies and define a clear goal so we can end this manageable crisis once and for all.

The goal should be utterly clear. Reduce the homeless pet population to a manageable number in America in several years. Impossible? Hardly. Several organizations have reduced the homeless pet populations to near zero in their communities by implementing very effective strategies. We can achieve the same nationwide.

The first step is simple. Spay and neuter your pets! It's a message we've all heard for decades. We simply cannot begin to effectively reduce the homeless pet population until a comprehensive nationwide sterilization program is put into place. No matter how much money is donated to rescues, no matter how many volunteers donate their time and no matter how many sappy commercials are produced, rescues are simply spinning their wheels until this issue is aggressively tackled. Failing to recognize that is analogous to buying more buckets instead of plugging the leak.

According to a recent study, spaying one dog can prevent the births of an astounding 67,000 dogs in six years. Spaying one cat can prevent

370,000 cats from being born in seven years. We can save millions of animals from being born into homelessness by spaying and neutering our pets. It just doesn't get much simpler than that.

However, rarely do I see efforts and policies geared specifically toward that goal. This was initially inexplicable to me, but now I understand why. Spay and neuter programs are costly, they don't generate any revenue and there are no short-term benefits. There's nothing sexy, fun or immediately gratifying about spaying and neutering. It's comparable to upgrading to an energy efficient appliance. It requires a large initial investment and it may take months or years before the cost saving benefits are realized. Only disciplined rescues, focused on the long-term goal of reducing the homeless pet population to zero, are focused primarily on spaying and neutering programs.

So how do we incentivize rescues to focus on spaying and neutering and overcome the many obstacles that prevent many caretakers from having the procedure done?

2. Spend money to save money

We must begin to encourage supporters of rescues to require that all or much their donation is directed toward spay and neuter programs. The next step is obvious. Use those funds to overcome the financial hurdle by subsidizing or providing free spay and neuter services to everyone regardless of income. Placing income restrictions on the program will only complicate the process and will prevent some from participating because of the embarrassment of revealing their finances. It's an expensive, but critical step in removing the primary obstacle. Some will say I'm living in an idealistic fantasy world filled with rainbows and unicorns for suggesting that all rescues simply offer free spaying and neutering services. Howev-



er, based on my conversations with several directors who have radically reduced the homeless population in their communities, significant cost reductions will be realized shortly after implementing an effective program. Here's why. The math is simple. Fewer puppies and kittens equal fewer intakes. Fewer intakes will result in lower food, housing, spaying, neutering, medical and placement costs.

3. Overcoming the machismo hurdle

The next step is to overcome cultural objections and to correct some common misperceptions about animals and sex. We've all seen the lifted pick up truck with two metal balls hanging from the tow hitch. It's the epitome of machismo, but it provides us with some insight as to why some men refuse to have their male dog neutered. No "real man" would allow his dog to have its balls cut off and lose its masculinity. But what's really fueling the resistance? One director believes there is a direct correlation between some people's refusal to have their pet spayed or neutered and an utter misunderstanding about animals and sex. Many wrongly believe that animals have sex for pleasure, as humans do, and spaying or neutering their best friend will deprive them one of the great pleasures of life. That's simply not true. Only humans and a few other species have sex for pleasure. Once the machismo ignorance is overcome another hurdle has been resolved.

> The "no kill" misnomer

4. The truth about "kill shelters"

I only supported so called "no-kill" organizations when I first launched my fundraising project. I thought I was doing the right thing. Why would I support organizations that euthanize animals?

It didn't take long to learn that the notion of "no-kill" is an utter misnomer. Here's why. No-kill rescues acquire some of their animals from county shelters that are typically required to take in all strays and surrenders in their community. "No-kill" rescues have the luxury of being able to select the "pick of the litter" - the healthiest, best-behaved and most desirable pets. Just as a grocer would select the best produce for his customers, a rescue will strive to present the best available dogs and cats to potential adopters. This efficient practice reduces health care costs, expedites adoptions and enables the rescue to quickly make room for more pets.

The county shelter is tasked with the challenge of caring for the remaining animals. Unfortunately, once they reach full capacity, they're forced to make the very difficult decision to euthanize the animals that have been there the longest and those with behavioral or medical issues.

These organizations are labeled as a "kill shelters" and consequently rarely receive financial assistance from donors who don't fully understand the unique challenges they face. I can assure you that the people working at kill facilities care just as much about the welfare of their animals as those working in so called "no-kill" rescues, but they're simply forced to euthanize because of their very limited resources.

Until so called "no kill" rescues and advocates can accommodate and place all of the animals residing at a county shelters, it's simply not fair for them to criticize organizations that are forced to euthanize animals. Their ire would be better directed at those responsible for creating more supply (e.g., those who refuse to spay and neuter their pets, irresponsible breeders and puppy mills, etc.).



> The fallacy of “no kill”

5. Why “no kill” doesn’t mean, “never kill”

It may surprise some “no kill” zealots that even the very best rescues have a “live exit” rate of around 95%. That means that approximately 5% of the animals entering the facility are euthanized because of health or behavioral issues. That’s further evidence that “no kill” is a misnomer and that “no kill” doesn’t mean, “never kill.” Euthanasia is simply a cruel reality of the rescue world.

For those of you who will continue to advocate for “never kill” – consider this. Just like a hotel, a rescue has a limited number of spaces that we’ll now refer to as “rooms.” Those rooms are quickly filled with strays, owner surrenders and animals pulled from county shelters. Once they’re full, the rescue can no longer take in any more animals. That’s it. There’s no more room. Unlike a hoarder, a responsible rescue recognizes there is a limit to the number of animals they can adequately care for at one time.

There are extraordinary costs associated with housing, feeding and caring for the dogs in each room. Fortunately, healthy, well-behaved dogs with pleasant dispositions are typically placed in just hours, days or weeks. Yet less desirable dogs with health and behavioral issues may occupy a room for months or even years. Yes, years. More on that later.

Responsible rescues strive to place as many animals into good homes as quickly as possible to help reduce the overall pet population. Therefore, it simply doesn’t make sense to have all of their rooms occupied with unhealthy, aggressive, unadoptable dogs. However, that’s exactly what would eventually happen if steps weren’t taken to put those unfortunate animals out of their misery in order to make room for more animals.

That exact scenario recently played out in Los Angeles where a misguided and idealistic effort to make Los Angeles a “no kill” city resulted in a large warehouse inundated with aggressive, unhealthy, unadoptable dogs. The only option became to continually increase the size of the facility and that’s clearly not a sustainable practice in the real world.

6. Why “no kill” doesn’t equal “humane”

When a pet is unwanted at a no-kill facility, they may be trapped in a cage for months and even years that could ultimately lead to “kennel craze,” a condition where dogs show aggressiveness, unsocial behaviors, spin in circles, bark incessantly and become extremely territorial. In some cases, no-kill facilities determined this quality of life as a better option than painlessly euthanizing an animal. The long-term care and housing costs are an enormous detriment and prevents the rescue from placing more adoptable animals or advancing spaying and neutering programs.

I have witnessed many scenarios where the unfortunate fate of an abused or injured animal was worse than death, but optimistically kept alive by compassionate “never-kill” advocates. Meanwhile, the county rescue continues to be tasked with the burden of euthanizing wonderful, healthy, adoptable, loving animals simply because there’s no available space at their facility or at the “no kill” rescue.

A few years ago, I met and photographed a dog that had been living in the same “no-kill” shelter in California for over five years. Yes, five years. He was a handsome, young, energetic, healthy dog. However, he was adopted and returned several times due to a series of behavior issues. Sadly, it wouldn’t surprise me if he were still living in the rescue today. Is keeping that poor dog alive humane? I don’t think so.



I really enjoy taking shelter dogs out of their kennel and spending some time with them in the studio. After only a few moments of play and treats, the fear and stress subsides and we begin to see their true personality shine through. It's absolutely heartbreaking having to wrestle them back into their kennel after bonding with them for an hour. Those experiences made it clear to me that dogs aren't happy in a shelter no matter how comfortable the accommodations.

We must ask ourselves if it is humane to allow dogs to live in a shelter for an extended period of time? Although some rescues go to great lengths to make pets as comfortable as possible, dogs become very stressed in a shelter environment.

So, how exactly should rescues deal with long-term residents? It's just one of many very difficult questions we must address before we can resolve the homeless pet crisis in America.

> Blinded by compassion

7. How caring kills

Let's revisit the opening scenario with a bit of a twist.

Imagine that someone just gave you \$15,000 and the option to use the money to either save the life of one animal or hundreds of animals. Again, the answer is obvious. You'll use the money to save many.

Let's take it a step further. What if you were given the option to spend the \$15,000 to save the life of a dog standing before you to your left or a dozen dogs to your right? The choice becomes more difficult, but you'll likely still opt to save the group of dogs instead of just the one.

Now imagine a puppy being placed into your arms as it's revealed she's in dire need of spinal surgery to be able to walk and live. As she peers into your eyes, you're given the option to spend \$15,000 to either save her or hundreds of other dogs you'll never meet. Suddenly your rational judgment is clouded by your strong emotional desire to care for the precious life resting in your arms. The choice should still be clear, but you've become blinded by compassion.

You're now intimately attached to another life and your innate desire to save her at all costs takes over. We can't help it. It's in our DNA. It's our nature as humans and as Americans. The more intimately attached we become to another life, the more we care about it. In the end, some of us will choose to save the life in our arms and others will choose to save the other lives of the dogs we'll never meet. It's difficult to condemn either decision.

This is an example of the difficult decisions people working in rescues and shelters confront each and every day. For example, I recently met a young lab that had life-saving spinal surgery. The rescue paid close to \$20,000 for the surgery. It was unclear at the time if the dog would ever be able to use its rear legs. Weeks later I learned that the same rescue was struggling to pay their rent. The question has to be asked. Should a rescue, especially one operating with limited resources, spend \$20,000 to save the life of one animal or could those funds be used more effectively? I argue that the puppy with severe spinal issues should have been humanely euthanized and the \$20,000 should have been used to house, spay and neuter dozens, if not hundreds, of pets and ultimately saved the lives of thousands of animals.

Even though I've dispelled the myth of "no kill," some of you will still be



outraged that I am advocating for the euthanasia of an innocent animal. For some there's simply no justification in ending an animal's life. As a lover of animals, I get that. As a pragmatist with a strong desire to solve a crisis, I have two choices. I can continue to articulate my argument in a more cogent way or shake my head and move on.

Veterinary care is very expensive and sadly, it simply doesn't make financial sense for a no-kill rescue to take in animals in need of care when other healthy pets are remain at the shelter. Until the homeless pet population is radically reduced, rescues just don't have the luxury of being able to take in unhealthy animals, requiring tens of thousands of dollars of veterinary care – that's simply not sustainable. Some rescues have veterinary care donated to them for these hardship cases. However, we should question whether the surgeon's time would be better spent spaying and neutering animals in the community.

> Identifying the primary goal

8. Moving beyond the “never kill” mindset

There's no question that the people working and volunteering at rescues care very deeply about the welfare of every single animal that enters their doors. Unfortunately, their desire to save every single animal prevents them from focusing on the big issue. They're, once again, “blinded by compassion.” The expression used to describe when a decision is made to spend an extraordinary amount of time and money caring for the well being of one animal when those resources could be used to save the lives of many animals.

It's not uncommon and completely understandable for an individual's bond with one animal to cause them to lose focus on the primary goal of

reducing the overall homeless pet population. It's human nature. However, in order to keep the team focused on the primary goal, it's vital that rescues train their staff to recognize when they're being blinded by compassion and the consequences of falling into that deadly trap. A failure of the team to remain steadfastly focused on the pursuit of the primary goal will only serve to exacerbate the problem and result in the euthanasia of thousands of animals in the future.

Sadly, until rescues can significantly reduce their occupancy percentage and implement comprehensive spaying and neutering programs, they simply have no choice than to take a pragmatic approach when deciding how to care for each animal. Unfortunately, euthanasia will be a critical part of that process for many years. There's simply no getting around that.

How can we incentivize rescues to stay focused on the primary goal of reducing the homeless pet population nationwide? A few national organizations have implemented programs designed to incentivize rescues to take in healthier animals by rewarding the rescues with the most adoptions through grants, subsidies or recognition. Individual donors and supporters can do the same by supporting the organizations that are placing the most animals instead of those doing the most to save the life of one animal.

> Vegetarians only!?

9. Another pitfall of idealism

What's more complicated than running a business? How about managing an organization with living, breathing inventory? Rescues are incredibly complicated businesses requiring expertise in management, marketing,



fund-raising and public relations. Most of the directors we've met are absolutely brilliant leaders of effective organizations. Others clearly lack the business acumen to run such a complex business. Compassion for animals alone doesn't qualify someone to manage a rescue.

We've found the most effective rescue executives typically have years of leadership experience in other sectors. Because those types of dynamic leaders rightfully demand a salary commensurate with their expertise, most rescues cannot afford to hire them. Which is why I cannot understand why some rescues impose bizarre employment requirements that only serve to shrink their pool of qualified applicants. Recently I saw a job listing for a marketing director of a rescue in Los Angeles. Vegetarianism was one of the job requirements. I was a vegetarian for several years, but would never have imposed my dietary choices on employees, family or friends.

This speaks to the underlying problem of idealism in the rescue culture. Yes, it would be nice if all of employees of an organization advocating for pets were vegetarians. However, the goal should be to hire the most qualified and effective person for the job and not the person who consumes the least amount of red meat.

Pragmatic leaders in the rescue industry have the ability to balance their compassion for animals with a disciplined approach needed to effectively reduce the homeless pet population in their community. We need to help rescues attract these rare individuals, help them pay their salaries and enjoy the benefits of their unique skills.

> Territorial behavior

10. Why aren't rescues helping each other?

Innovative rescues communicate well with other organizations and are able to benefit from a myriad of opportunities including the ability to share ideas, establish best practices and even exchange pets to ensure they have a varied "inventory" of adoptable pets. For example, while Chihuahuas account for somewhere between 20% and 30% of the rescue population in Los Angeles, they are more rare in the eastern states and consequently there is a higher demand for them. A few rescues are working together to relocate these little dogs across the country and into caring homes.

Sadly, this is the exception and not the rule. Why aren't more rescues reaching out, networking, communicating and sharing ideas and resources with other rescues? Moreover, one could argue that some poorly managed and strangely "territorial" rescues are actually exacerbating the homeless pet population in their community. Sometimes it seems like some of these organizations are more interested in self-preservation than solving the crisis. Is that possible? And if so, why?

Let's face it. Eradicating the homeless pet population in a community may eliminate the need for the shelter. Therefore, the question must be asked. Are all rescues really doing everything in their power to eliminate the homeless pet overpopulation or is another agenda taking precedence?

Delicate questions like these must be boldly confronted if we want to significantly reduce the homeless pet population.



> Pit bulls

11. The big “elephant in the room”

Onto the most delicate issue of all...

In 2005, I produced a big coffee table book of dogs titled, “Rover” to try to help pet rescues. I proudly featured a pit bull on the cover of that first edition. I was an advocate for all dogs back then, including pit bulls. Six years later I chose to include only one pit bull mix in the Rover Greatest Sits Edition, as I sadly can no longer encourage people to adopt pit bulls in good faith.

My watershed moment came after reading a story about a toddler who slipped through a doggie door and was mauled to death by her family’s seven pit bulls in Ellabell, GA in 2013. We can debate forever about whether or not pit bulls are dangerous, but the fact is that it’s very, very unlikely a group of Golden Retrievers would ever kill a toddler.

Pit bull advocates argue that there are no bad pit bulls, only bad pit bull owners. I personally disagree. I know very little about the breed, except that the only times I ever felt threatened while photographing over 600 dogs, came when photographing pit bulls. On several occasions I felt the hair on my neck raise, felt threatened and I ended the shoots. It’s my personal belief that pit bulls are dangerous to toddlers and smaller dogs. I’m not alone. Many communities, including the city of Denver, have banned ownership of pit bulls. There’s a reason for that.

Rescues and shelters are inundated with pit bulls and cleverly disguised “lab mixes.” They account for an astounding 30% of all dogs living in rescues. Why is that? To me that’s a clear indication that pit bull owners are

less likely to have their pets spayed or neutered, provide them with adequate shelter and are far more likely to abandon or surrender their animal.

The large pit bull populations in shelters keep potential adopters away and serves to advance the stigma of shelter dogs. Moreover, rescues have a difficult time placing pit bulls. As a result, pit bulls occupy kennels in rescues for long periods of time. Space that could be utilized to house and place many less aggressive dogs that are far easier to place.

Let the fire storm begin in 3... 2... 1...

I’m sure my comments will ignite a flurry of harsh criticism, which will include me being labeled as insensitive, racist or “breedist,” from the politically correct social media mob. It won’t surprise me if they also try to defend or justify the aggressive behavior of pits and dismiss the threat they pose to children and other smaller animals by suggesting that the attack on the toddler was the fault of the parents for not securing the doggie door or their failure to train their pits to not maul a child.

However, we need to address the pit bull issue head on if we are going to resolve the homeless pet crisis.

> Selling dogs

12. Stop the sadness!

Now that we’re focused on spaying and neutering to reduce production of product, we need to focus on “selling” existing “inventory.” There’s plenty of it.



Face it. Rescues are in the business of selling dogs. However, while many rescues do a good job of promoting their efforts to save lives, few do a good job of creating demand for their product. Instead, many rescues seem to rely on sympathy and sadness to move product. “Please take this dog that nobody else wants” is not an effective sales tactic. No other business would ever use such a tactic because it simply doesn’t work. For example, if you’re anything like me, you likely reach for the remote the moment you hear Sarah McLachlan’s voice. It’s time to ditch the sad, sappy commercials that advance the stigma that shelter dogs are sad, scared, lonely animals and time to produce ads that are as much fun as the dogs! Positive commercials, which highlight that healthy, smart, loving, fun, beautiful and unique dogs are available at rescues, along with the joy and pride experienced by people who have welcomed a shelter pet into their home, would be a far more effective marketing strategy.

13. There’s no selling stale bread

Often rescues will display the animal’s “intake date” outside of its cage. A used car dealership would never want you to know that the car you’re looking at has been sitting on their lot for several months, so why do rescues do this? It won’t take long before potential adopters will pass by a dog and wonder, “why hasn’t anyone taken this dog home? I wonder what’s wrong with him?” As preposterous as it sounds, rescues would likely have far more success getting dogs adopted by placing euthanasia countdown clocks outside of their cages. What’s more ludicrous? A countdown clock or an intake date?

Removing the intake information on cages is a good way to overcome one of the many apprehensions people will have before they commit to welcoming a pet into their home. Disclosing that the dog has been in the cage for several months later in the process may serve to inspire the



owner to take them home, but that's not vital information that needs to be revealed when a first impression is being made. Relying on someone feeling sorry for a dog because it's been in a shelter for several months to sell inventory is an ineffective tactic. Rescues should instead try to create a sense of limited availability and consequently a sense of urgency to sell product - just like any other business would.

14. Promoting the rescue experience

Thousands of people have proudly introduced their wonderful rescue dog to me during the last few years. Many share that the beautiful dog standing beside them was scheduled to be euthanized days, hours or even just minutes before they saved its life. It's difficult to fully process that the gentle and loving dog before me was about to be put to death simply because there wasn't enough money or space to accommodate him in the overcrowded rescue. Eventually the dog's caretaker will lament that it was the dog that really saved them. I hear that a lot. There's no question that a special bond develops between a dog that was at death's door and the angel who saved its life. I can see it in the eyes of both the dog and its caretaker. It's a real thing.

That special bond, the feeling of saving a life, the countless moments of joy and the sense of purpose that results from rescuing a pet is part of the shelter brand experience and one that we all need to do a better job of promoting.

15. Overcoming the shelter dog stigma

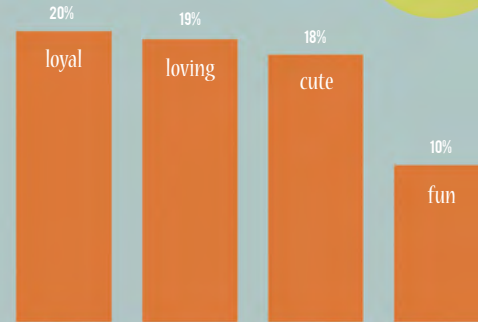
There remains an inexplicable and persistent myth that shelter dogs, mixed breeds or "mutts" are somehow inferior to purebreds. While many see adopting a rescue as a badge of honor, there are still those who perceive

results of our

online survey

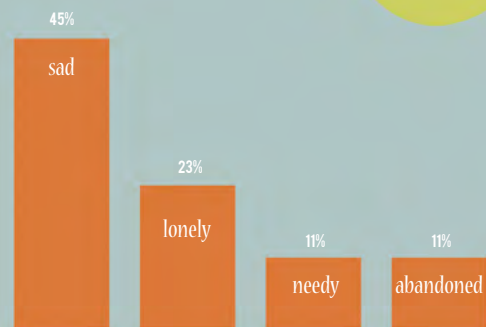
most popular words to describe:

A DOG IN GENERAL



most popular words to describe:

A SHELTER DOG



INSIGHT

there is a **STIGMA** associated with shelter dogs that causes people to believe they are undesirable.



shelter pets as being less healthy, needy and difficult to train. As a result, they won't consider adopting a pet from a shelter and instead acquire their new pets from a breeder or puppy mill.

16. Puppy mills

Yes, puppy mills. Believe it or not, they still exist in some parts of the country. While most have been shamed out of business, others will continue to exist as long as they are profitable. A significant percentage of intakes are surrendered by impulse buyers who purchased their cat or dog from a puppy store in the mall. Often times these animals are purchased around the holidays for boyfriends or girlfriends who may not have the ability to care for and accommodate an animal for a long period of time. As a result, shelters are always inundated with the latest "trending" dog sold by puppy mills.

I believe we can drive all of these mills out of business by continuing to educate people about responsible pet ownership and that high quality pets are available at rescues. Sadly, until puppy mills are completely eradicated, they will continue to impede the efforts of thousands of people working hard to promote rescues.

Thanks to those who share their personal rescue stories, countless others look forward to adopting a shelter pet of their own. It's vital that we continue to work hard to convey that there are healthy, smart, loving pets available for adoption from rescues so we can increase the rate in which dogs are adopted. Doing so will increase the size of the "army" of rescue advocates, increase adoptions and make room for more intakes, expedite adoptions, reduce costs and advance spay and neuter efforts.

17. Showcasing purebreds

During my time on the road, I've met many good people who prefer to acquire their dogs from a breeder. I get it. Some breeders produce beautiful dogs with wonderful demeanors. Some people simply have a penchant for a particular breed. Others strive to have some type of added assurance that they're bringing home a well-behaved and healthy dog.

I find it very difficult to criticize anyone who welcomes any type of pet into his or her home, so I'm not going to do that. Secondly, I don't believe responsible breeders, or the folks acquiring dogs from them; have significantly contributed to the homeless pet population (for the most part). Finally, I simply don't know enough about the differences in behavioral and health issues between purebreds and mixed breeds to cast judgment. However, I do know there are many misperceptions about shelter pets in general.

Therefore, instead of debating the virtues of purebreds versus mixed breeds, we should instead focus on promoting availability of many different breeds at rescues. Many people are surprised to learn that approximately 30% of the rescue population is made up of purebreds. They're even more surprised to learn that only 20% of the dogs relinquished to a shelter were originally adopted or acquired from a shelter. Some purebreds enter shelters after being deemed inferior by a breeder because of a minor "flaw." Others are surrendered by owners who are unable to care for their pet because of financial, personal, housing issues or simply the inability to care for an animal. Still, others sadly end up at a rescue when their caretaker dies.



Regardless of how purebreds end up in a shelter, it's important that rescues do a better job educating people that virtually any type of dog, including rare purebreds, can be found at a rescue with a little time, patience and resourcefulness.

18. One size doesn't fit all

Most rescues acquire their animals in a variety of ways including owner surrenders and strays. Others are brought in from other facilities (typically county shelters). Therefore, most rescues have the ability to control at least some of their inventory. Offering shoppers with a variety of options without overwhelming them is a crucial rule in retail, but something rescues typically fail to do. The most effective rescues offer prospective adopters with a variety of dogs in different sizes, shapes, colors, ages and energy levels.

19. Limited availability

Have you ever walked into a Marshalls, Ross or TJ Maxx and felt overwhelmed by the clutter of inventory? I know I have. Even though they may offer some great deals, many opt to shop at a tidy boutique a few doors away simply because it's a simpler, more relaxing and enjoyable experience. Which is why the most effective rescues will only present a portion of their inventory to potential adopters. By limiting the number of choices, the rescue will create a more enjoyable "shopping" experience while creating a sense of limited availability, urgency and desirability thereby improving the chances that the shopper will take home a pet.

20. Quality assurance

Another crucial step in overcoming the shelter dog stigma is to continue to ensure adoptable rescue animals are healthy when their new caretaker takes them home. These efforts reduce the returns and advance the message that quality dogs are available for adoption.

21. Generating traffic

Rescues, just like retailers, work hard to get people in their doors. However, unlike most retailers, rescues are confronted with some very unique challenges. First and foremost, many rescues are located in outlying areas away from retail centers. Secondly, many people are afraid to visit shelters because they fear they'll take a pet home based on guilt or any overwhelming sense of sadness. Others are afraid to visit rescues because of the heartbreaking images they've seen in those sappy commercials.

These unique traffic challenges have been addressed by a few rescues in some creative ways. Some have opened small retail stores at satellite locations where a few pets are available for adoption. Others have expanded services to include retail, grooming, veterinary care and boarding. Both serve to increase traffic, which will increase adoptions and generate additional revenue. Another approach involves bringing a group of adoptable animals wearing "adopt me" vests to shopping centers, events, etc.

22. Improving the shopping experience

It costs money to get people into the door of a rescue. Once they're inside, it's important to provide them with a pleasant experience to increase the amount of time they spend looking at adoptable animals. I've been overwhelmed by loud barking, growling, and shrieking at many rescues across the country. Many rescues quiet animals by placing dividers between kennels to ensure dogs aren't facing each other, play calming music, etc. There are a wide variety of noise absorbing materials that can be placed on the walls and ceilings. It's a simple, but crucial step that can greatly enhance the chances a visitor will leave with a new pet.



23. Letting go, let the animal go home

Recently, a friend attempted to adopt a cat from a large and well-respected Los Angeles area rescue. She's approximately 30 years old, a business professional, homeowner and a compassionate, responsible pet owner and advocate. It was very troubling to learn that her application to adopt was inexplicably denied because the adoption coordinator personally didn't see her as "a good fit for the cat." Please note this rescue was inundated with cats and kittens at the time. Unbelievable.

Obviously, it's important for rescues to establish adoption requirements, to ensure pets are placed into safe homes with responsible owners. These safeguards are designed to reduce the possibility of the animal facing neglect, abuse, placed in an unsafe environment or used as bait in dog fighting rings. Moreover, these efforts are designed to properly match the needs and energy level of the pet with the same lifestyle of the potential adopter to reduce the chances that the animals will be returned. However, the screening process used by the rescue visited by my friend was highly unreasonable, clearly subjective and consequently the experience gave her a highly unfavorable view of all rescues. I've heard similar accounts from others and this is inexplicable and maddening to me.

This is yet another symptom of the "idealism" culture in some rescues. Just as some will only consider hiring vegetarians, it's quite clear that some have established highly unreasonable or biased adoption requirements. Volunteers and employees inevitably grow very attached for the animals they care for and it's a natural and noble desire to ensure they are placed in a loving home. This is another example of why it's so important for rescues to train employees to recognize when they're being blinded by compassion, and to refocus on the common goal of reducing the homeless pet population nationwide.

A less idealistic and more businesslike approach would serve rescues well. I'm certain our friend would have had little or no difficulty buying a cat from a breeder. I'm not suggesting the breeder is less concerned about the well being of the animal, only that the breeder takes a more business-like approach. When a responsible customer has cash to purchase their product, a sale is made. Rescues need to find a more reasonable balance between responsible and over zealous screening. Until the homeless pet population in America is significantly reduced, rescues simply don't have the luxury to enforce unreasonable adoption requirements. There are just too many homeless animals.

> Government & adoption fees

24. The good and the bad

As an advocate for less bureaucracy and smaller government, it pains me to suggest any type of governmental regulation, intervention or mandated fees and taxes. However, during a recent trip to Switzerland, I noticed an absence of stray animals. I later learned that anyone interested in acquiring a dog in Switzerland must complete pet training classes then pass tests to demonstrate basic animal welfare knowledge before being granted a pet ownership license (which comes with a significant annual fee). The program helps to ensure responsible pet ownership and has reduced the homeless population to near zero in the country. While a program like this has proven to be effective in a small country, enforcing a law like that in America would be nearly impossible. However, Switzerland has proven education coupled with fees is an effective way to reduce the homeless pet population. Again, I'm not advocating for government intervention, but perhaps there's a lesson here that could be utilized to advance more responsible pet ownership in America.



Although most cities and/or states require rescues to spay and neuter all pets before they are adopted, this is not always the case. Legislation needs to be enacted to require all rescues to spay and neuter all animals before they are released from their facility.

While some rescues offer free adoptions, others charge significant fees. However, there are some unintended consequences associated with offering free or discounted adoption fees. First and foremost, that can advance irresponsible pet ownership. Charging an adoption fee not only helps to cover the costs associated with housing, medical care and spaying and neutering efforts, but requires the adopter to demonstrate financial responsibility and greatly reduces the chances the dog will be returned because the adopter cannot provide housing for the animal.

> It takes money to raise money

25. What I learned while working with rescues

I am a commercial photographer specializing in portraiture, architectural and fine art photography. I'm hired to produce photographs for advertisements, catalogs, magazine covers, book covers, etc.

I first heard the heartbreaking euthanasia statistics in America in 2009. The housing crisis was reaching a crescendo, pets were being abandoned in foreclosed homes and consequently, rescues were inundated like never before. I was compelled to act and days later (I can be impulsive at times) began producing a coffee table book of dogs to raise money for rescues and bring awareness to the problem. I knew nothing about photographing dogs or publishing a book at the time, yet nine months later, I watched Ellen DeGeneres flip through the pages of Rover on her show after announcing she gave a copy to Oprah for Christmas. It was the cul-

mination of months of serendipity and another in a long line of “signs” that I was on the “right path.”

Shortly thereafter, I began meeting with the directors of rescues. It quickly became apparent that they most were in dire need of financial support more than anything else. Therefore, I launched a program, which enabled donors to have their dog photographed and featured in the next edition of Rover. That program has since generated donations totaling more than one million dollars for over 25 rescues across the country. However, I take far more pride in the fact that we bridged many relationships between deserving rescues and generous donors who continue to support the organizations today.

Selected rescues were able to use the unique and exclusive Rover opportunity as a vehicle to get existing donors involved and to attract new donors in their community. Although we try to do much of the marketing ourselves, we do rely on the help of rescues to leverage their media relationships, etc. to aid in promotion. Several rescues were able to raise meaningful amounts of money by effectively helping us promote the project, but others rescues simply lacked the resources, energy, marketing or networking expertise necessary to take full advantage.

Although most rescues eagerly accepted the opportunity to work with us, a few declined. Some weren't interested in the project while others viewed it as a conflict with another program (e.g., annual calendar). I completely understood that. However, there were a few that declined because “100% of all the funds raised wouldn't go directly to the pets” because some of the money raised would have to be used to offset some of the costs associated with marketing, promoting and executing the project.



The fanciful notion that 100% of the money raised from any fundraising project would all go “directly to the animals” (whatever that means) speaks to the underlying culture of idealism and a lack of business acumen. Experienced fundraisers understand there are always ancillary costs associated with marketing, promoting and executing a program or an event. Furthermore, no responsible organization is capable of assuring donors that 100% of the funds raised will go “directly” to the pets when there are so many costs associated with running a rescue (e.g., salaries, utilities, rent, maintenance, marketing, transportation, etc.). Moreover, no reasonable donor can expect that 100% of their donation would go directly to the animals and would never impose that type of restriction.

> Where to donate

We had the luxury of being able to vet organizations before advocating for donations. I encourage you to do the same before sending a donation to a rescue. Tour the facility, meet the director, learn about their practices and confirm they're proactively involved in local spaying and neutering efforts. You'll quickly be able to assess which organization(s) will most effectively use the funds you donate to place pets into forever homes.

Please know, while some rescues face a daily struggle to stay afloat, others are so well funded that they don't know what to do with all the money. It's true. A few organizations have so much money in their coffers that they're able to justify chartering private jets to rescue an animal from across the country. Meanwhile, other very deserving and effective rescues in less affluent areas, have converted old broom closets into offices while placing thousands of animals per year. They simply don't have access to local donors who are able to offer significant financial support. I am certainly not suggesting that you shouldn't donate to large or well-known

rescues as many of them do extraordinary work. I'm simply encouraging you to consider all factors before making your donation.

It costs a good deal of money to operate an effective rescue. A common misperception is that everyone working at a rescue (or any non-profit for that matter) is a volunteer. That's simply not true. Even though many rescues are able to recruit volunteers, most employ a large staff. That's just one of myriad of operating expenses.

Please consider donating your money or volunteering your time to one of the many wonderful rescues and shelters across America. You'll be rewarded in many different ways.

> Best practices

Innovative ideas from rescues across the country

Here are a few of the best operational, marketing and facility ideas we've seen at rescues in America.

Individual kennels featuring indoor and outdoor spaces. A lift gate, which divides the two areas, can also be used to contain the animal on one side of the kennel while the other is being maintained. Brilliant!

Dividers in the aisles prevent dogs from seeing other help to reduce noise (from barking) and stress.

Soundproofing provides visitors with a much pleasant experience.

Some rescues play calming music, which has been proven to relax dogs, in the kennel areas.



Some rescues use various colored paint in kennel areas to relax both dogs and visitors.

Many rescues have partnered with local pet food makers to provide meals for their animals.

Rescues license (or sell) the naming rights of facilities to donors to generate donations just as stadiums do. Others feature photos of their donor's pets on the side of spaying and neutering vans, magazine ads, annual reports, etc.

The ASPCA's Meet Your Match Program allows rescues to evaluate an animal's behavior, energy level and interests and matches them to an adopter's preferences and lifestyle, not only serves to facilitate and expedite adoptions, but also reduces the likelihood of a return.

Many rescues acquire a significant percentage of their dogs from owner surrenders. Many times, distraught pet owners are forced to surrender their beloved pet due to extraordinary circumstances (e.g., landlord issues, foreclosure, relationship and marital problems, etc.). Therefore, some rescues offer programs that provide care for the pet while owners take steps to get back on their feet. This is a brilliant, effective and wonderful program.

Some rescues offer temporary accommodations for dogs belonging to homeless people so they can eat, shower and attend services, etc. where animals are not allowed. Many homeless people will give up their accommodations or meal services because they cannot leave their animal unattended.

A few rescues located near veterinary schools have initiated “vet-residency” programs that dramatically reduce the cost of some medical procedures. Residency students are able to handle the simple tasks of spaying and neutering while the more challenging surgeries and jobs are left to the advanced professionals.

Trap and release programs are a proven way to get a handle on the cat overpopulation. Rescues, especially in warm climates areas like Hawaii and Florida, have done a tremendous job catching, sterilizing, tagging and releasing cats which otherwise will reproduce several times throughout the year. Rescue groups in the warmer climates have also seen a dramatic decrease in the cat population because of trapping and release efforts. This is a great way to manage semi-homeless cats or cats that are fed by several homeowners in an area.

Only approximately 20% of missing animals are returned to their owner. A percentage of those missing animals eventually end up at a rescue. Therefore, some rescues have started free microchip programs, which increase the chance of a missing dog being returned to its owner by 300%. The costs are offset by the reduction of animal care costs.

Some rescues offer free or reduced price collars to adopters to ensure their dogs are leashed at all times. The cost associated with the program is offset by fewer stray dog intakes.

Transport programs have made a tremendous impact on diversifying animals across state lines. Shipping companies and volunteers work with rescues to trade inventory or match a donor with their new best friend.

Some rescues have implemented their own foster program or partner with individual foster groups to accommodate the most fragile animals. Some dogs simply cannot cope in a rescue environment. Others have medical issues that require additional care and attention.

> About the author

A little bit about Andrew Grant

Andrew is a commercial photographer based in California. His photographs of actors, authors, celebrities, kids, models, musicians and professional athletes, including Alicia Keys, Kurt Warner, Joe Montana and many others, have been featured in hundreds of advertisements, books, products and magazine covers. Andrew is most proud of his soulful portraits of hundreds of pets as they serve to convey the message that healthy, smart, loving pets are available for adoption at rescues. His various efforts have generated over \$1,00,000 of donations to rescues across America while producing four editions of Rover, a coffee table book of dogs. His latest edition of Rover, The Greatest Sits Collections, is available at fine retailers across the country. Learn more at AndrewGrantPhoto.com and RoverWorks.org.



