

The following article is reprinted with permission from Xan Rawls, Director of Citrus County Animal Services (Florida). Citrus County refers to their shelter as an “umbrella shelter”, meaning that they accept any animal that comes through the door for any reason. In Pasco County, we use the term “open admission”, meaning that we too accept any dog or cat brought to our shelter. Like Citrus County, Pasco works directly with dozens of rescue groups, humane societies and other interested persons actively involved in the mission of assisting homeless domestic animals. We encourage pet owners to have their animals spayed/neutered, licensed and vaccinated. Those three steps are the foundation of responsible pet ownership. So why isn’t Pasco County Animal Services a “no kill shelter”? This is eloquently explained in Ms. Rawls article, reprinted below.

WHAT IS A “NO KILL SHELTER”, AND WHY ISN’T CITRUS COUNTY ANIMAL SERVICES ONE?

Answering the first part of this question appears simple at first. A “no kill shelter” is a shelter that promises not to euthanize animals within its care. Having a “no-kill” policy makes owners more comfortable with the decision to relinquish their animals to a shelter because they don’t have to contemplate the unthinkable. A “no-kill” environment is also more pleasant for staff and volunteers, who are never in a position to invest time and emotion into animals that may eventually be euthanized. But given the undeniable reality that there are far too many pets and far too few good homes, what does “no-kill” mean in the big picture of animal services and the humane treatment of animals in our community? What happens to animals that are too sick to be saved? What happens to animals that are too aggressive to be adopted? Contemplating these questions makes it very apparent that – at least on a community-wide level “no-kill” policies are simply too good to be true.

Why isn’t Citrus County Animal Services (CCAS) a “no-kill” shelter? The answer to that is complicated. Many people are not aware the CCAS is an umbrella shelter meaning we accept any animal that comes through our doors for any reason. Humane Societies and other “no-kill” shelters are funded solely by donations, memberships, sponsorships, grants, bequeaths, adoption fees, fundraisers, and thrift shop sales. Animal Services, however, receives funding from the Board of County Commissioners. Animal Services is in charge of picking up stray animals, investigating animal cruelty cases, monitoring bite cases, and many other animal-related duties. When someone surrenders a dog to the shelter or brings in a feral cat, they are dealing with Animal Services.

While most private “no-kill” shelters have the option of turning animals away if their facilities are full or if an animal is dangerous or otherwise problematic, CCAS **MUST** accept every animal that is either surrendered or in need. We can never be “too full” or an animal can never be “too dangerous” for us to deal with. Unfortunately, our Animal Services Officers and other staff see far too much for comfort: dogs, cats and other pets that have been physically, emotionally and medically neglected to the point that they simply cannot be saved. Our Animal Services staff is forced to do a job, day in and day out, that most of us would find unendurable. They do it because they know these animals need humans to see them through, to hold a paw, stroke their fur, tell them none of this is

their fault, and show them as much love and compassion as many of them have ever seen in their lifetimes.

You can imagine the toll this takes on shelter workers as a group. If you look down a list of classes offered at a shelter conference, you will see classes like GRIEF MANAGEMENT and COMPASSION FATIGUE. It's no wonder then that government funded animal shelters are the most hard-hit by the implications of "no-kill" policies, policies that seem, at times, intended to pass oral judgment upon what they are required to do for the safety of the public and for the overall benefit of animals. It makes "no-kill" a very polarizing issue in some communities. Because of this unnecessary polarization, nationwide many "no-kill" proponents are beginning to moderate their view points on "no-kill" and working instead toward a more comprehensive approach that encompasses the realities faces by communities overrun with unwanted and/or unadoptable pets. Realizing that ALL animal welfare organizations provide essential services to pet-owners in any community, it seems counterproductive to take sides when for any animal welfare organization the ultimate goal is the same – to find a good home for every adoptable animal. In our community, CCAS counts on the aid of Humanitarians of Florida, Room For One More, Citrus County Humane Society, breed-specific rescue organizations, and countless other groups and individuals that participate in this important work. We are all a part of a network that acts as a safety net for the thousands of pets and pet owners in our area.

At CCAS, once animals are evaluated medically and behaviorally, they are placed up for adoption. There is no "time limit" at our shelter. At that point, extraordinary efforts are made to find appropriate homes for them. Once an animal has been in our care for several months, to contemplate giving up is just too painful an option, as evidenced by the number of "much loved rejects" that members of our staff and volunteers have collected over the years! "For every adoptable animal, a good home" is the overall mission of our shelter staff and as members of a humane community, we should never have to contemplate euthanizing a healthy, well-tempered animal. With your help and support we CAN accomplish that goal!

Thank you for your interest and efforts to help our sheltered pets!
Xan Rawls, Director