Peninsula Humane Society & SPCA

PHS/SPCA BY THE NUMBERS

The data provided below was updated January 25, 2017 and will be periodically updated.

The numbers at a glance…

…PHS/SPCA accepts 100% of the animals brought to us for help: unlike most other animal charities here in the S.F. Bay Area we accept every animal, regardless of that animal's health, age, behavior, and even regardless of the animal's species. We are truly an "Open Door" facility…

…despite that unusual fact and the obvious challenges it creates, PHS/SPCA guarantees a home for 100% of the healthy, adoptable dogs and cats we receive, with animals now able to remain at the shelter and receive love, care and attention for the days, weeks, months, even a year or longer it may take until a new permanent home and family is found…

…and continues to increase the numbers of pets treated and then adopted through our Hope Program which focuses life-saving efforts to an ever growing percentage of the animals who come to us sick, injured, too young to be away from their mothers, or behaviorally challenged…

…every year, PHS/SPCA saves the lives of thousands of animals:
homeless, injured, orphaned, unwanted, lost, abandoned and often mistreated animals, including dogs and cats and other companion animals, farmed animals, exotic animals, and native wildlife…

…has reduced euthanasia in San Mateo County by 98.2% since 1970 and continues year after year to push ahead, making this among the safest and best places in the nation for companion animals…

…all of this wonderful work made possible, in part, through the support of over 1,400 active volunteers and more than 24,000 local contributing families and households.

For more details about the statistics behind the success, please read below….

Peninsula Humane Society & SPCA

THE PURPOSE OF THIS SECTION

As the largest and most effective animal welfare and protection charitable organization in this community, the Peninsula Humane Society & SPCA (PHS/SPCA) absolutely believes in transparency and accountability. While the work we and others do for animals cannot be completely explained by the statistics alone, the numbers do of course help explain the story – and by any measure, the information provided through these statistics is both very positive and encouraging. The purpose of this section of our website is to provide an opportunity for individuals and organizations to review PHS/SPCA's efforts by those numbers.

WHAT TO MEASURE

It only makes sense that most people looking at shelters want to measure the effectiveness of those hands-on programs which save lives – how many animals were saved, and how many were euthanized: those are the two questions most frequently asked. But to fully understand the answers to those questions, one must know more than simply a set of numbers, One must keep in mind that, as in most situations, numbers only have meaning if understood within a meaningful context: for example, while the number 100 can mean "perfect" on an exam, it can also indicate a really lousy score in the context of the 2400 points available for the SATs. Or, in yet another context, it can mean the start of an illness if measuring your body's temperature with 98.6 as the norm. So while of course every individual life saved must be celebrated as a victory and every life lost acknowledged as a failure, context is needed to judge a shelter's effectiveness through its numbers.

So what is the context for reviewing a shelter's numbers? What, really, are you measuring? There are three parts to answering that question.

1. First, it's important to know how well a shelter is doing compared to itself: how is it doing now compared to the years before? While any individual year may be up or down for all sorts of reasons, when considered over time is progress being made, are programs and initiatives working? Are the numbers trending in the right direction, are more lives being saved over time?

2. Second, it's important to know how well that shelter is doing in comparison to others, but that's not actually easy to figure out. To do so requires knowing definitions of the terms used by those several sheltering organizations which are being compared, making sure the comparison is truly "apples-to-apples". In other words, what does it really mean to learn a shelter hasn't euthanized any animals if it is accomplishing that goal by refusing to accept hard-to-place animals (such as those with medical or behavioral problems, or older animals, or certain breeds), simply leaving those animals to be euthanized at another shelter which has no such restrictions? Can you really compare those two shelters effectiveness? Perhaps, but it's obviously going to be more complicated than simply placing their numbers side by side.

3. And finally, it's important to know if the shelter is moving towards a clearly expressed long-term goal, and then to look to see if their statistics demonstrate progress towards that goal.

Although the language may vary, in fact most progressive communities and their shelters now express that goal as the sum of two separately ambitious objectives, and that certainly includes PHS/SPCA. The first objective is to end the euthanasia of all animals who come to the shelter as healthy, adoptable animals. PHS/SPCA met that objective in 2003 and has never, and will never, waiver from it. With that accomplished, the second objective – which PHS/SPCA addresses through our Hope Program – is to make well ever increasing numbers of animals who come to the shelter with treatable medical and behavioral problems, and eventually end the euthanasia of those animals as well. (More about those terms, below.)

So if that's the goal and that's what you're looking to measure, what is the scale? What are the measures or the matrices best used to look at a shelter, to look at PHS/SPCA?

HOW TO MEASURE

There have been a number of efforts over the past several years to develop standard measures for statistical reporting by both private humane societies and their government animal control counterparts. Some of these measures have proven helpful but, as yet, there's no perfect system in place. Something that is not always clear to the public, the thousands of private and public animal organizations around the nation are each separate and distinct entities, not members or chapters of some national organization, and as such each keeps its statistics in the way they chose as best for their particular programs.

In recognition of this and of the immense variation in both programs and communities, even those measures which strive to eventually become the universal standard leave critically important definitions up to the individual organization utilizing those measures – as such, it still remains exceedingly difficult to find a meaningful "apples to apples" comparison between different shelters.

Many shelters – for reasons of resources or philosophy – only accept into their care some of the homeless animals in their community, so comparing their numbers with a different community's shelter which accepts every animal is a false and potentially misleading comparison. Some shelters will automatically euthanize animals over a certain age or of a certain breed, classifying them as "non-adoptable" by virtue of their age or breed.

Some shelters consider feral or under-socialized cats to be more like native wildlife than like house pets and, as such, do not count the deaths of those animals in their statistics referencing the companion animals in their shelters; others simply refuse to accept the responsibility of caring for and working to find homes for many of the cats in their communities, even

friendly and social cats. And a practice distinct from typical Trap-Neuter-Release (TNR) programs where volunteer caregivers take responsibility for "colonies" of feral cats, in a new trend PHS/SPCA finds especially disturbing a number of shelters are simply abandoning (no caregivers) surgically altered cats (and, in some cases, even dogs) back to the neighborhoods, parks or open spaces from where they originated: a move which helps that shelter's statistics but certainly cannot be argued as a humane outcome for animals which are of course not native wildlife.

And when it comes to rabbits and other small companion animals, most shelters simply do not accept them (unwanted rabbits are now about as common in many parts of the nation as are homeless dogs and cats).

Again, those who compare shelters with a critical eye are cautioned to make sure that they understand the numbers being reported and not just simply accept them on face value. For these reasons, we believe that the most valuable and perhaps the only honest comparison isn't made by comparing one shelter to another but instead by reviewing an individual shelter's progress over time. However, both opportunities are presented here regarding the work of PHS/SPCA (i.e., PHS/SPCA today compared to its past, PHS/SPCA compared to other organizations).

PHS/SPCA, AN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Although founded in 1952, PHS/SPCA's shelter statistics only exist as far back as 1970. While it would be interesting to know the story of those first 18 years, nonetheless we are now able to take a serious look at the result of one organization's, and one community's, four-plus decades of dedication to saving lives.

In that earliest year on record, 1970, PHS/SPCA was clearly overwhelmed with homeless companion animals. Not coincidentally, 1970 is also the year PHS/SPCA opened the doors of its low-cost public spay/neuter clinic (the first humane society in the nation to do so) and just a few years prior to beginning its formal public education and advocacy department. As is apparent in the chart below, the positive results of those efforts would take years to bear results, but the results would happily come!

In 1970, PHS/SPCA euthanized a total of 37,680 dogs and cats, a truly horrifying number (the number of animals other than dogs and cats who were euthanized is not available for those early years). And while the death of a single animal is a death too many, compare that number with the 846 dogs and cats euthanized in 2015 and you will recognize a reduction in euthanasia of 97.75%, a remarkable achievement for this community.

The chart below provides euthanasia statistics for the most recent year (2015) and that first year (1970) as well as a number of years with key program changes along the way. This snapshot-in-time approach best demonstrates long-term trends, since any individual year may err off the trending curve in response to unanticipated and one-time, unique factors).

As such, this approach more accurately shows progress over time, with footnotes pointing to key program initiatives and developments believed at least partially responsible for that progress. It tells a compelling story…

Table 1: An Historical Perspective			
Calendar Year	Euthanized Dogs	Euthanized Cats	Euthanized Total
1970 [see NOTE 1]	15,884	21,796	37,680
1975 [see NOTE 2]	8,321	8,413	16,734
1980	3,648	4,775	8,423
1986 [see NOTE 3]	3,502	6,988	10,490
1990 [see NOTE 4]	1,738	7,300	9,038
1993 [see NOTE 3]	1,269	6,207	7,476
2002 [see NOTE 3]	881	2,500	3,381
2005 [see NOTES 5 & 6]	686	2,020	2,706
2011 [see NOTE 7]	676	1,445	2,121
2012	546	1,120	1,666
2013	536	822	1,358
2014	435	544	979
2015	344	502	846
2016 [see NOTE 8]	287	405	692

FOOTNOTES:

1. As noted above, statistics for the year prior to 1970 are not available. 1970 is also the year that PHS/SPCA opened its low-cost public spay/neuter clinic, a clinic which has been in constant operation since that date.

2. PHS/SPCA opened its public education/advocacy program in 1975, a program which has been in constant operation since that date.

3. Data for 1986 is presented here because complete, comparable data is not available for 1985; 1993 is used instead of 1995, and 2002 instead of 2000 again for the same reason.

4. San Mateo County and PHS/SPCA introduced the Pet Overpopulation Ordinance in 1990. This ordinance is largely viewed today as a failed but honest effort, a view shared by PHS/SPCA. It can be viewed and credited, however, as partially responsible for fueling the public discussion on companion animal issues and overpopulation.

5. In 2003, PHS/SPCA formally announced the commitment to never again euthanize a healthy, adoptable dog or cat, a promise which has been and will continue to be kept. PHS/SPCA created its foster care program in 2003, formalizing the in-home care of underage and convalescing animals. Also that year, PHS/SPCA refocused its animal behavior program, already among the first in the nation, to provide expertise both into the shelter and to the public; that program has expanded each year.

6. PHS/SPCA launched its mobile spay/neuter clinic in 2005, providing no-cost spay/neuter to the pets of low-income households in San Francisco and San Mateo counties.

7. PHS/SPCA opens its Center for Compassion last quarter of 2011.

8. Most current complete calendar year.

PHS/SPCA's LIVE RELEASE RATE (LRR)
Effective 2002 PHS/SPCA starting tracking its statistics through something called the Live Release Rate or LRR. PHS/SPCA was one of the early shelters promoting a means by which organizations could report in a simple and direct way the following: of the total number of animals who enter a shelter, what is the percentage of those animals who leave the shelter alive (through all humane and appropriate means including adoption, return to original owners, transfer to other shelters and adoption partners [aka, "rescue groups"]). Although a more complicated and, in our view, far less helpful version of the LRR has evolved over time (discussed below), this original and simple LRR is in our view the best means of tracking and reporting this data in a meaningful way.

California law (CA Penal Code 599d, elsewhere in State law further amended and expanded upon, sometimes referred to the Hayden Bill in honor of Assemblyman Tom Hayden who first introduced this legislation) divides companion animals (dogs, cats and the other small animals commonly kept as pets) in shelters into three major categories, and defines those categories as follows:

1. "**Healthy, adoptable**" animals, as defined by State law, are those "animals eight weeks of age or older that, at or subsequent to the time the animal is impounded or otherwise taken into possession, have manifested no sign of a behavioral or temperamental defect that could pose a health or safety risk or otherwise make the animal unsuitable for placement as a pet, and have manifested no sign of disease, injury, or congenital or hereditary condition that adversely affects the health of the animal or that is likely to adversely affect the animal's health in the future." The short version of the State's law boils down to this: Healthy, adoptable shelter animals are those who need nothing more than vaccination, sterilization, and a loving home.

2. The second category is for those animals classed as "**treatable**" companion animals, defined by State law as "any [companion] animal that is not adoptable but that could become adoptable with reasonable efforts." While one might have hoped for more specificity than this definition provides, the intent is clear: "treatable animals" are those with a medical or behavioral problem, but not a problem so complex and/or expensive to treat that most of us wouldn't provide care if this animal was already in our home rather than at the shelter.

3. The final of the three categories, "**non-treatable**" companion animals, are those with medical or behavioral conditions which would not likely or reasonably be addressed by any owner/guardian or any organization. These are the animals for whom euthanasia is the only reasonable humane solution, and sadly they too come to open door shelters in significant numbers. Sometimes they come as the very ill or very aged pets of people who trust the humane society to gently end the life of beloved companion. Sometimes they come as the victims of egregious, intentional cruelty, or unimaginable neglect. Sometimes they come as the victims of accidents. But the point is that they do come to those shelters which, like PHS/SPCA, accept all animals regardless of their health, behavior, age, background or even species. They come by the thousands.

And let's be very clear about this: PHS/SPCA does not pIay games with these terms. In our shelter, a healthy and friendly 10 year old pit bull, as one example, is defined as a "healthy, adoptable" dog, and the same dog with, say, a broken leg is defined as a "treatable" dog. In some shelters, pit bulls are simply not accepted or, if allowed to enter the shelter, are immediately deemed "non-adoptable, non-treatable." And, some shelters may not ever make a dog or cat over 4 or 5 years of age an "adoptable" animal, or may consider under-socialized, fractious or feral cats as "wildlife" and as such not include the euthanasia of those cats in their statistics at all.

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Table 2: Live Release Rate (LRR) Report for 2016,
with comparable data (indicating trending at 5 year intervals) for 2010 and 2005

2016 Calendar Year Live Release Rate						
Type of Animal	Live Animals Received	Live Animals Placed	Healthy Animals Euthanized	Treatable Animals Euthanized	Non-Treatable Animals Euthanized	Live Release Rate (LRR)
Dogs	2,480	2,194	-0-	9	278	88%
Cats	2,212	1,807	-0-	7	398	81%
Other pets	886	753	-0-	5	128	85%
TOTAL	**5,578**	**4,754**	**-0-**	**21**	**804**	**85%**

2010 Calendar Year Live Release Rate						
Type of Animal	Live Animals Received	Live Animals Placed	Healthy Animals Euthanized	Treatable Animals Euthanized	Non-Treatable Animals Euthanized	Live Release Rate (LRR)
Dogs	2,996	2,380	-0-	78	538	79%
Cats	3,773	2,142	-0-	382	1,249	57%
Other pets	849	759	7	13	70	89%
TOTAL	**7,618**	**5,281**	**7**	**473**	**1,847**	**69%**

2005 Calendar Year Live Release Rate						
Type of Animal	Live Animals Received	Live Animals Placed	Healthy Animals Euthanized	Treatable Animals Euthanized	Non-Treatable Animals Euthanized	Live Release Rate (LRR)
Dogs	3,228	2,542	-0-	96	590	79%
Cats	4,131	2,111	-0-	348	1,672	51%
Other pets	1,350	1,033	18	71	228	77%
TOTAL	**8,709**	**5,686**	**18**	**515**	**2,490**	**65%**

NOTES TO TABLE 2:

- PHS/SPCA currently finds homes for far more "treatable" animals than it does "healthy, adoptable" animals, which reflects the fact that it receives – and then makes well – a greater number of animals who come to the shelter with a pre-existing medical or behavioral problem than those who come to us healthy and ready for adoption. To make this work possible, PHS/SPCA has become one of the largest employers of veterinarians and animal behavior professionals in the Bay Area, and relies heavily on tremendous

support from over 1,400 active volunteers.

- Treatable animals euthanized are, of course, all available to other sheltering organizations and adoption partners ("rescue" groups), many of which are our valued partners in a combined community effort to save lives. The only companion animals currently euthanized at PHS/SPCA are animals for whom, at the present time, no other options are available.

- Without in any way discounting the extremely important help of these smaller groups, the numbers of animals from this community which end up in the care of other shelters and "rescue groups" is really very small; unlike most other California groups, PHS/SPCA is not only this community's private non-profit humane organization but under contract with the County also provides state-mandated animal control services for the County and all of its 20 incorporated Cities. As such, in San Mateo County one can look at PHS/SPCA's numbers and know the Live Release Rate. In most other communities, animal control is completely separate from the humane organization and those two sets of numbers – and in some communities even more than just two sets – must be gathered and compiled to get the complete story.

- These statistics do not include native wildlife. PHS/SPCA provides rehabilitation for injured and orphaned native wildlife for three counties: San Mateo County, northern Santa Clara County, and San Francisco City and County (birds only). In addition to the numbers above, in 2016 alone a total of 1,388 wild animals were made well and returned to their natural habitats by PHS/SPCA.

For further evidence of an extremely positive and largely consistent life-saving trend, the following chart presents the LRR each year from 2003 through 2016:

Year	Dogs	Cats	"Others"	Combined Dogs/Cats	Combined All
2016	88%	82%	85%	85%	85%
2015	88%	79%	90%	84%	84%
2014	84%	76%	91%	81%	82%
2013	82%	70%	85%	76%	77%
2012	78%	55%	84%	72%	73%
2011	76%	55%	88%	66%	69%
2010	80%	57%	89%	67%	69%
2009	81%	57%	80%	67%	69%
2008	81%	58%	82%	69%	71%

2007	84%	53%	70%	66%	67%
2006	79%	51%	72%	63%	65%
2005	79%	51%	72%	63%	65%
2004	79%	51%	71%	63%	64%
2003	79%	44%	53%	59%	58%

And as noted before, over the same period of time (2003-2016) PHS/SPCA has not only lived up to the commitment to never again euthanize a healthy dog or cat, but has also dramatically increased its commitment to make well and then find homes for those animals who come to us with treatable medical and behavioral conditions, animals often turned away from limited admission shelters. Those numbers, at a glance at the first year and the most current:

Year	Treatable Dogs Saved (Hope Program)	Treatable Cats Saved (Hope Program)	Treatable Others Saved (Hope Program)	Combined Total, Treatable Animals Saved
2016	834	959	357	2,150
2003	331	804	472	1,607

Another way of looking at this: PHS/SPCA was able to make well and then find homes for approximately 134 treatable animals every month in 2003. In 2016, that increased to 180 animals made well and then re-homed on average every month.

So while the data proves a positive trend with both cats and "other" pet animals over the past decade, how does PHS/SPCA's LRR compare when measured against other sheltering organizations..?

HOW DOES PHS/SPCA LIFE-SAVING WORK COMPARE TO OTHER SHELTERING ORGANIZATIONS?
As discussed above, it is extremely challenging to attempt any meaningful comparison among different shelters' success rates. One glaring example as to why such a comparison is challenging, note that the single largest category of companion animals euthanized is "non-treatable cats." A large sub-category within that group is made up of those feral and under-socialized cats who come to us but for whom there are no feral cat caretakers available. As discussed earlier, quite a few shelters simply no longer count these cats as part of that organization's own LRR report; instead, other shelters "spin" this number by claiming undersocialized cats are so like wild animals that the euthanasia of these cats is classified as the death of wildlife, a category which is excluded from their own LRR reports. Or applying

an even more suspect logic, some shelters simply abandon undersocialized or even perfectly friendly and healthy cats when the numbers are challenging, dumping these animals back onto the streets (without caregivers and not in managed Trap-Neuter-Release TNR colonies), frankly without regard to the health and welfare of either those cats or native wildlife.

If PHS/SPCA were to follow that practice, our LRR would increase. However, it wouldn't mean more animals saved. It would only mean a "better" number on the report. How meaningful is it, then, to compare PHS/SPCA's LRR with another shelter which follows what we believe are flawed, unethical practices?

Similarly, many shelters only accept healthy animals, leaving "treatable" and "untreatable" animals for other organizations. If you only accept perfectly healthy animals, there's a pretty good chance you will adopt all or almost all of those animals. Again, it's not that such a philosophy and practice result in more lives saved, but only in a higher statistical report. And again, how meaningful is it to compare PHS/SPCA's LRR with another shelter which follows such a philosophy and practice?

And yet other organizations, while limiting the animals they select from their own communities, chose to reach out to other and sometimes quite distant shelters to import often extremely appealing and adoptable dogs. While a consistent and understandable philosophy may be at the root, the impact certainly will increase a shelter's own LRR without, once again, doing anything to reduce euthanasia in its own home community. Is this, then, an apples-to-apples shelter for comparison?

There are, however, a number of national and regional estimates of LRR that are worth stacking up, recognizing that PHS/SPCA is not the source of any of these national or regional estimates. Here's what is out there:

- A number of years ago, without attribution as to source, a national estimate of 35% LRR (reduced to 30% LRR if "other" companion animals were added to the count) began to circulate. Recently, the national estimate one hears repeated is closer to 50% (again, with a drop of approximately 5% or more if rabbits, rodents and other smaller pet animals are included). Although a large range, the figure of 30-50% LRR is now the nationally discussed average.

- In 2006, the City of Los Angeles' Department of Animal Care and Control reported a California state-wide LRR for dogs and cats of 49%, reportedly basing that figure on data received from the California Department of Health Services. While no similar figure was reported for LRR including "other" companion animals, it is probably safe to assume the number would drop by at least another 5% if those animals were added to the calculation.

- In 2005, an informal survey of larger organizations (similar, in broad terms, to the scope and size of PHS/SPCA) through the Society of Animal Welfare Administrators (SAWA) website reported a national average of 44%.

From all the known reports and estimates, then, we see a national and California State average ranging from a low of 30% LRR to a high of 50% LRR. By comparison, PHS/SPCA's own LRR (as shown above, along with contributing data) is 85% for all animals (88% for dogs alone, 82% for cats alone, 85% for rabbits and all "other companion animals" alone).

A COMPLETELY DIFFERENT MEASURE

Separate from the LRR, there is also a completely different measure also regularly referenced for shelters. Called either the "Kill Rate", "Euthanasia Rate," or "Euthanasia Per Capita Rate", the "Rate" is a simple mathematical formula of the numbers of dogs and cats euthanized in all the shelters which serve an individual community compared to the number of humans (in increments of one thousand) residing in that community.

Certainly some of the value of this system is in its simplicity. However, the definition of "community" has not been consistent and the reports that have been published to date present and compare individual cities, counties, and even whole states with each other. Regardless, shelters are increasingly being asked for their "kill rate" or "euthanasia rate", and when asked this is the number that one is requesting.

The last "Kill Rate" report we've seen was published in Summer of 2009, and it compared the "euthanasia per capita" rates of close to 100 communities around the country. That report noted a tie for the lowest rate in the nation between San Francisco and San Juan Capistrano with 1.3 dogs and cats euthanized for every 1,000 human residents. New York City followed in second place with a rate of 2.0, followed by Huntington Beach with a rate of 2.5.

Odessa, Texas, ranked worst (with a rate of 71.4) followed by Orangeburg, South Carolina, at 49.5; and with a score of 40.9 for Fresno, the worst "Kill Rate" in California.

San Mateo County was not included in that 2009 report. Had we been, the rate would have been 2.9, making it the fourth lowest in the nation. Calculated with the data now available for PHS/SPCA from 2016 and the number of residents adjusted to the most current U.S. Census (which estimates 2015 population of 765,135), that rate drops even lower, down to 0.9 or the very lowest euthanasia rate of what would have been reported that year.

SUMMARY

By any measure, PHS/SPCA is doing extremely well in its efforts to save lives. The credit belongs to a community which supports and embraces the mission, for a humane society is only as good as its community. And as its community expects and deserves, PHS/SPCA will continue to work towards the goal of further reducing euthanasia.