



UPPER PENINSULA ANIMAL WELFARE SHELTER

P.O. Box 968

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Per the request of Shirley from YesBiscuit, below is our current average cost-per-animal versus what it was the last full fiscal year before we started implementing changes toward no-kill. Because the old data came from our 2005/2006 fiscal year, I converted 2006 dollars to 2013 dollars so that we are comparing apples to apples.

It took awhile to put some numbers together because cost-per-animal is not something we regularly calculate. The only time it is used is when we prepare to negotiate contracts for impound services with municipalities. As far as we are concerned, the cost-per-animal is irrelevant. Each animal is evaluated on its own merits and if a decision is made to euthanize, bottom line is that it better be a justifiable one. Just this year our shelter manager has taken it upon herself to make sure a note is made in her shelter stats report next to any animal euthanized giving the Board the animal's name and specific reason for being euthanized. She feels strongly, and the board agrees, that in doing so, it is giving those animals a measure of respect and helps to ensure they are not just case numbers or statistics, but that each and every one should have a "face".

The figures being provided should be considered as a case study. They represent how things have played out for UPAWS. Our experiences, methods of resolution, and results are most likely unique to us. We are not saying anything we did or are doing is the best way or the only way. Every shelter has its own sets of strengths, weaknesses, and obstacles and the path each needs to travel will be slightly different depending on those factors. What works for one shelter, will not necessarily work for another.

But that does not mean the killing can't be stopped; it only means that shelters will need to be creative in finding what works for them. There are key areas that every shelter must address in order to be successful. The differences lie in the specifics which vary by shelter.

What is important is the unwavering decision to not kill healthy, treatable, adoptable animals. Once that decision is made and everyone (board, staff, volunteers) are committed to that goal, it can be done. It won't be easy, there is no cookie-cutter approach, and there is no slacking off. Obviously finances are a concern in running any shelter and have to be taken into consideration, but finances should not be an excuse to stop evolving. Rather they should serve as a prompt telling you that a particular area requires more creative thinking to get what you need.



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As mentioned earlier, UPAWS has not used cost-per-animal in any decision-making processes. We were therefore very surprised to learn from a study done by an architectural firm in 2012 that our cost-per-animal is roughly one-half the national average for open admission shelters (no-kill shelters tend to run much higher). In addition, based on a metric formulated by UC Davis, while the maximum absorption capacity (i.e., adoptions) nationwide is 10 animals per 1,000 people, UPAWS has an absorption rate of 23 animals per 1,000 people. So based on national averages, and in simplistic terms, UPAWS has been able to adopt more than the double the animals at less than half the cost per animal than the national average...and has done it while remaining a no-kill, open admission shelter.

Why this is, we don't really know. Based on our 38-year history, I suspect most of it is because UPAWS made some fundamental changes and focused on a promise and commitment to save lives and to always look for a Plan B, or C, or D. The "promise and commitment" was to the animals in our care and our community. We are now transparent with our supporters, releasing our annual stats and financial statements for viewing on our website. This is an important step because the transparency has engendered trust from our community. Admittedly, other factors may have played a role, but until the change, our save rate was in the toilet, and our financial situation dire...to the point we were on the verge of closing our doors. It wasn't until we changed our philosophy that everything else changed.

Now for the numbers, all of which are based on our fiscal year so that we could compare animal stats to dollars for the same period. And again, the dollars have been adjusted for inflation to allow for comparable comparisons. In FY 2005/2006, UPAWS admitted 1,456 animals, 530 left our shelter alive resulting in a save rate of 36.4%. Our cost per animal was \$190.85. In FY 2012/2013 we admitted 1,620 animals, 1,628 left our shelter alive resulting in a save rate of 100%. Our cost per animal was \$207.58, or \$16.73 (8%) more per animal. Looking at it from a strictly numbers viewpoint, by killing 63.6% of the animals, we were also basically throwing away the corresponding revenue those animals represented (after all, we didn't fulfill our mission to save and re-home them). That amounts to \$178,636 when for another 8% (\$15,660) we could have saved nearly every one of those 936.

But, and this is the reason we don't look at cost-per-animal, the numbers do not end with expenses. While cost-per-animal rose, two other areas also rose. First the figure of \$207.58 includes a number of services and programs we were not providing seven years earlier.



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By 2013, we were open seven days a week and one evening, including every holiday except Christmas (instead of being open only five days a week). Advertising animals through the UPAWS website, print-radio-TV media, and social media and keeping the public updated from start to finish in terms of adoptability and outcome, became standard. Pet sponsorships became and continue to play a huge role in getting animals adopted (donors can opt to pre-pay for medical care, vaccinations, or all or part of adoption fees for specific animals). Promotions with accompanying adoption fee reductions or waivers were being used on a regular basis. We had implemented reduced adoption fees for seniors and “Lonely Hearts” (those animals who have been in the shelter 3 months or longer). People willing to adopt animals for what would equate to hospice care had fees waived. All animals were being microchipped and we were Felv/FIV testing all cats and heartworm testing all dogs. In addition, staff and volunteers began making a more concerted effort at reuniting lost pets with their owners and becoming more pro-active in pet retention efforts.

Also, not included in the cost-per-animal, a community spay-neuter program was instituted to assist pet owners in getting their animals altered which ultimately reduces the numbers of litters being admitted and a Home-2-Home program that allows owners to use the UPAWS website to advertise pets that need re-homing, thus preventing them ever being admitted to the shelter. (A number of restrictions were put in place to avoid advertising by breeders.)

The second very important component that cannot be ignored is that while the cost-per-animal rose 8%, we also saw an increase in donations of 43% and a net increase in fundraising efforts of 294% for an overall increase in revenue of 61%. This is where the transparency and trust, mentioned above, enters the equation. Obviously, the increased revenue more than makes up for the cost-per-animal, and has allowed us to implement more services, become pro-active and plan for a future (including plans for a new shelter). Also, in calculating revenue, I did not include income from bequests, which while hard to budget or predict, can have a huge impact on the future of a shelter and its animals.

When reviewing the ramifications of becoming no-kill, the move has actually generated more revenue, is securing a stable future, and has made UPAWS a recognized, respected and trusted part of our community. It is always a source of pride to hear from participants at non-profit conferences and workshops that UPAWS is now their charity of choice – before even their own non-profit! Those are things you can’t readily translate to dollars and cents when looking at saving animals. Those are the intangibles that get



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animals adopted, that promote good will, that generate support in the form of volunteers, foster homes and in donations. It is something that is in the heart of a community that wants to support a shelter that they feel confident is doing everything in its power and ability to put the animals first. That is why we don't really care about the "cost-per-animal, we just care about the animal.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Reva Laituri".

Reva Laituri
President, UPAWS