

Thinking Outside the Shelter

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GSRNC has been rescuing GSDs for seventeen years. I have had the privilege of participating for the past thirteen years. I remember my first Adoption Day in Los Gatos where we adopted three dogs that day. I will never forget how good that felt. Volunteering with GSRNC has been one of the most rewarding things I have ever done.

I think we all feel good about what we do, and we should. We are all very good at what we do, but I am wondering if maybe we should be doing more.

Every day we get emails from people needing to find homes for their dogs as well as from shelters looking for help with the shepherds they have in their care. About four weeks ago, we received an email from a shelter in Southern California asking us to help with at least a couple of the twenty-eight GSDs they had. Wow! I thought to myself, "Southern California sure has a big problem."

Then two weeks ago, we received an email from an individual concerned about the forty-eight GSDs at the shelter in Modesto. I couldn't believe it! I went to the shelter's website and sure enough, they had forty-eight beautiful GSDs in their care. They also had fifty pit bulls and, if you add in all the other breeds, they had a total of 276 dogs! I didn't even check the cat population. I'm appalled! This is out of control.

So, I started thinking about what we're doing. It's been seventeen years of evaluate, pull, foster, adopt, repeat. Evaluate, pull, foster, adopt, repeat. Between evaluate and adopt, there is a lot of work being done by a lot of people.

What if one day our evaluators came back from the shelters and said there were no GSDs that needed our help. Just one day. Wouldn't that be awesome? The reality is there will always be shepherds that need our help. But what if we could eliminate the ones that need help due to greed, irresponsibility, ignorance or just plain stupidity? Believe me, we get the stupid emails too.

How do we do that? Maybe we need to start thinking outside the shelter.

Best Friends Animal Society has been doing just that for over forty years. They have worked with shelters across the country to set up Trap and Release programs. Feral cats are trapped, spayed or neutered and then released. This is huge when you consider how many litters a female cat is capable of having in her lifetime and then how many litters her offspring will produce and on down the line.

About 10 years ago, they started working with major cities across the U.S. to get city councils to pass ordinances banning the retail sale of cats, dogs and rabbits in pet stores. Now they are taking it to a larger scale. Effective as of January 1st 2019, California will be the first state to

make it illegal to sell cats, dogs and rabbits in pet stores. This, as a result, eliminates a large market for the puppy mills.

This is great, but will it be enough? Probably not. Some people will see an opportunity to make a quick buck by breeding cats and dogs and selling the kittens and puppies on Craig's List or at flea markets. The problem isn't just about where the puppy came from; it's about overbreeding.

Some years ago, Santa Cruz County passed a mandatory spay or neuter law. There are exceptions for licensed breeders, show dogs and police dogs. At the time, the shelter had a mandatory three day hold on strays that were brought in. If the animal wasn't claimed by the owner within three days, the cat or dog was put down.

Five years after the passage of the spay/neuter law the shelter dropped the three day mandatory hold. The numbers of animals coming in had dropped dramatically and the shelter was able to keep them until new homes were found for them. The dogs and cats that had to be euthanized dropped dramatically as well.

A mandatory spay or neuter proposition has been on the state ballot in California twice. Both times, the proposition was defeated. This is part of the reason that Modesto has 276 dogs and God know how many cats. Add the dogs and cats in the shelters across the state, and we're talking about a lot of death.

It's time to think outside the shelter. GSRNC will continue to evaluate, pull, foster, adopt, repeat. But maybe we can broaden our horizons and start working on the root of the problem rather than just the end result.