

Letter from the President

(Fall/Winter 2010 Newsletter)

While holding the office of President is totally uncharted waters for me, my association with UPAWS/MCHS has been long, educational, and rewarding. I first began volunteering in 1981 so I have had the rather unique privilege of seeing the organization evolve over many years. There were many notable benchmarks along the way, but none can compare with the strides made in the last two years, particularly in adoption numbers. We were finally – FINALLY - able to turn some very depressing euthanasia/adoption statistics around. While we hated the high euthanasia rates, we believed they were inevitable if we were to remain an open admissions shelter (a shelter that never turns an animal away). It was what nearly everyone in the animal welfare field told us. They were wrong and we were wrong.

Those numbers could be and were changed. In just one year we did more than just flip the euthanasia/adoption rates around. By radically changing our mindset and refocusing our efforts, we were able to go from an adoption rate (those animals leaving the shelter on their on four feet) of between 34-40% from 1999-2006 to just over 93% in each of the last two years. That is more than flipping the numbers – it is blowing them out of the water.

In the process we learned something else. Many of the fears we had associated with change were just that – fears. As new programs were implemented, the community was more than willing to provide the support needed to keep them in place. The end result was that over the last two years, YOU – *every member, every foster home, every donor, every volunteer, every adopter* – have been directly responsible for 3,201 animals walking out of shelter and given second chances. And isn't that what it is all about? On behalf of each and every one of those animals, thank you.

Reva Laituri  
President



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No Kill Advocacy Center  
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Dear Sir or Madam:

As part of a shelter that did more than a complete turnaround on its adoption/kill rates, I wanted to share with you some of our story. We moved from an average "kill" rate of 60.33% (1999-2006) to 7.8% in 2008/09 and 6.2% last year (stats are based on our fiscal year which runs June 1-May 31). June 2006 to May 2008 were transitional years. On average we admit 1,525 animals per year.

It wasn't until the summer of 2006 that UPAWS (then known as the Marquette County Humane Society) began making some hard decisions and taking positive steps toward becoming the shelter we are today. Over several months a number of things happened that culminated into what I refer to as "the perfect storm" that gave our organization the perfect opportunity and courage to change our direction and commit to a new and brighter future.

Like so many shelters, we were operating with an administrator that had been with us for over 20 years and who was extremely resistant to change. Outdated policies were built on myths and fallacies. Several influential volunteers and supporters suffered from "Founders' Syndrome". We were afraid that if changes were made and supported by the community, the result would be that animals would have nowhere to go and we were their only and final hope. This was a major consideration as we were hanging on by a thread and ready to close our doors. But perhaps in part because of our precarious situation, we had little to lose and much to gain. It was at this time a number of things came together to create the "perfect storm":

- ⇒ A long-time supporter/volunteer/board member introduced our board to Nathan Winograd's Redemption.
- ⇒ The reputation and support of our humane society, its rigid and judgmental rules and policies, and unfriendly atmosphere, were spiraling toward disaster. Many complaints and issues were brought to light and to the attention of the Board.

- ⇒ We had a fairly new Board of Directors that was open and ready for a change and who had the wherewithal to buck the status quo to make a number of hard decisions.
- ⇒ We were introduced to “Meet Your Match” and the philosophy behind the program.

Probably more than anything else Redemption became our beacon and we always came back to the idea of “thinking outside the box” and believing there is always another option – if you look for it. We quickly started making changes. Although we were still fearful, the results spoke for themselves and we realized we could save lives and do it without condemning animals to fates “worse than death” as we had been routinely warned. As more animals went into homes instead of garbage bags, the direction we had chosen to take was validated and many of the fears and premises we had based our policies on were proven to be invalid.

Now, please join me on our journey to date:

- ⇒ 2006:
  - Adopted Meet Your Match Program and it’s accompanying philosophies which included abandoning a multi-page pre-adoption questionnaire in favor of a one page what-kind-of-pet-are-you-looking-for form. Unfortunately, this was not fully and truly implemented until 2007, as we later found out our Director had been undermining a number of key premises of the program.
  - Exchanged lecturing potential adopters in favor of discussions regarding expectations. Had to overcome roadblocks from administration and some staff.
  - Board began investigating complaints and demanded better PR and more use of volunteers.
  - Over the next year, a turnover in Staff occurred when several could not get on board with proposed changes.
- ⇒ 2007:
  - E.D. resigned in late 2007. Rather than replace E.D., the Board assumed many of those duties to ensure changes were implemented and a vacant position of Shelter Manager was filled. Under the new Shelter Manager:
    - Shelter hours open to public increased from five to seven days a week.
    - Shelter was cleaned and painted and made more inviting.
    - Staff interactions with the public and volunteers were greatly improved.
    - Use of foster homes was greatly expanded.
    - More efforts were placed into rehabilitating animals through socialization, finding stress relievers, and working on and correcting issues such as food aggression.

- Pet sponsorship programs were implemented that would allow for reduced adoption fees (Buddy Program, Senior Program, and general sponsorships).
- Implemented feline leukemia testing through sponsorships.
- Increased advertising of animals.
- Began spaying and neutering adoptable animals as soon as possible so that they could go home sooner.
- Began transfer programs with other shelters and rescue groups.
- Remote adoption programs initiated.
- Website updated daily with pet photos, videos and bios. Pleas for special needs animals are advertised in a timely manner and updates on their status provided. (Visit our website at [www.upaws.org](http://www.upaws.org) ). Also joined Petfinders.
- Integration into the community (e.g., increased communication with County administration to facilitate a better working relationship with the Prosecutor's Office in neglect and abuse cases, participation in the County's Disaster Preparedness Program, etc.)

⇒ 2008 – Present:

- Above programs improved and expanded upon.
- Increased ties and partnerships with groups and businesses within the community.
- Cageless cat room designed and used.
- Two-way trust with the community elevated to the point animals are brought to our shelter from across the region because people know no animal is ever turned away, and every effort will be made to give them a chance at another home. In return, when costly medical procedures are needed to save an animal, the community immediately steps forward and provides the funding. People are willing to foster animals through rehab – both physical and psychological. People want to volunteer, donate, adopt... in short be a part of the effort.
- Homes or sanctuaries found for FIV positive cats.
- Opened a Facebook account and began participating in almost anything that will give our animals and shelter exposure.
- Appear monthly on a local television program to promote animals, programs, fundraisers.
- Regular news releases to keep our name in the community.
- Changed our name from the Marquette County Humane Society to the Upper Peninsula Animal Welfare Shelter to better reflect who we are.

We are extremely proud of how far we have come and what it has meant for the animals, and we have done it by overcoming many hurdles – many of which we are still working to overcome:

- ⇒ Maintaining our status as an open admissions shelter – NO animal is ever turned away.
- ⇒ Providing impound services for all but two municipalities in our county.
- ⇒ Continuing on our new path despite opposition and roadblocks placed in our way by those still loyal to the old precepts of animal sheltering.
- ⇒ Opposition continually expressed by the local State Dept. of Agriculture inspector (a strong advocate of euthanizing sick animals or those who might be in need of behavior rehabilitation – he is also averse to cageless cat rooms).
- ⇒ A small shelter with limited space.
- ⇒ Limited funding – when this transition started we were close to closing our doors.
- ⇒ Fighting an uphill battle against years of bad PR, and misconceptions as to our affiliations and funding sources.
- ⇒ Local veterinarians who will not perform early spay/neuters and sometimes question our decisions to seek medical treatment for pets, especially the elderly. (We do not have a Vet on staff.)

For your information and review I have enclosed an overview of our stats for the last ten years as well as a fairly recent, more detailed monthly report. Please keep in mind in reviewing the statistics that they are a modified version of the Asilomar model.

- ⇒ Admissions are subcategorized by strays, owner-surrenders and transfers.
- ⇒ Animals leaving the shelter are broken out into those that are redeemed by owners (we are the impound facility for most of our county) and those that are transferred to wildlife rehab or released back into the wild, those that are transferred to other rescue groups and those that are adopted.
- ⇒ We have a category that includes animals that die of natural causes, are brought to the shelter dead on arrival, or turn up missing or have escaped.
- ⇒ For those being euthanized, we felt it important to categorize the reasons for euthanizing – in part for statistical reasons, and in part to make sure everyone sees on a regular basis the reason each and every life is lost at our hands. We want to ensure the reasons for euthanasia are valid and the numbers don't start drifting the wrong way for the wrong reasons.

Perhaps one noteworthy point to make at this time is that our shelter does perform owner-requested euthanasia. Our staff does this as a public service to owners who can't afford to go to a vet or have some other compelling reason. Our staff reserves the right to refuse to do an owner-requested euthanasia so if they feel an animal is adoptable, they have the option to decline to perform euthanasia. The animals euthanized tend to fall into two major categories: 1) elderly and/or terminally ill animals that are deemed to be suffering and incurable; 2) aggressive and dangerous animals (sometimes these are animals that have been brought in by law enforcement for biting and aggressive behavior, the owners are identified and surrender ownership of them). They are unadoptable as they represent a danger to the community.

If one adjusts for animals released to wildlife rehab, those who died of natural causes or were received dead on arrival and for owner-requested euthanasia, our statistics are even more impressive!

You might have noticed a sharp decline in wildlife admitted to the shelter in recent years. This is due to the fact that instead of acting as a intermediary in getting animals into wildlife rehab, we are now referring people directly to the rehabilitators.

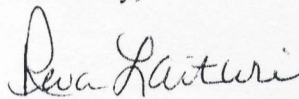
As previously mentioned, the statistics are based on our fiscal year which runs from June 1 to May 31. Early years were not initially compiled on the Asilomar model and were converted after the fact. Also, there is a discrepancy in our 2002/2003 stats which took place in the record-keeping and we were unable to reconcile the difference.

While we still have a long way to go (e.g., a feral cat program, an on-going community spay/neuter program, more programs and efforts made toward pet retention, an improved and more effective volunteer program, etc.), the changes so far have had extraordinary and far-reaching effects, many which were totally unexpected - and in very good ways. Our future is one we look forward to because we now KNOW what "thinking outside the box" can truly accomplish and that we have to let go of our fears and misconceptions and try new things. The animal welfare community is fortunate in that most groups are so willing to share in their successes and teach others from their failures. All we have to do is ask and listen. It has not always been easy, but it continues to be extremely rewarding.

Along with this letter and our statistics, I am also enclosing a letter that will be appearing in our upcoming newsletter under "Letter from the President".

Please feel free to share our story with anyone you wish and if you would like to talk to anyone, you can reach me at [REDACTED] or you can contact our Shelter Manager, [REDACTED]

Sincerely,



Reva Laituri  
Board President

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