PHS/SPCA BY THE NUMBERS

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 1600 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. While of course every individual life saved must be celebrated as a victory, and every life lost also must be acknowledged, 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 dogs and cats 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 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. Two examples to show how confusing this issue can be include one national organization which has recorded national live release rates of between 50% and 65% for dogs and cats while another has reported an 83% live release rate.

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 choose as best for their particular programs.

In recognition of this confusion 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, known as limited admission or no-kill shelters, only accept into their care *some* of the homeless animals in their community. Other shelters, known as open admission shelters (including PHS/SPCA), accept all animals that come in. So,

comparing the numbers of a no-kill shelter with a different community's open admission shelter which accepts ***every*** animal is a false and potentially misleading comparison.

Some shelters consider "feral", fractious or under-socialized cats to be more like native wildlife than like 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. (A conversation for another time, but many cats deemed "feral" by shelters may be perfectly friendly and social cats in environments other than shelters.) A practice distinct from typical Trap-Neuter-Release (TNR) programs where volunteer caregivers take responsibility for "colonies" of cats, in a relatively new trend PHS/SPCA finds especially disturbing a number of shelters are simply abandoning (no caregivers) surgically altered cats 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 and guinea pigs 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 1950, PHS/SPCA's shelter statistics only exist as far back as 1970. While it would be interesting to know the story of those first 20 years, nonetheless we are now able to take a serious look at the result of one organization's, and one community's, over half-century 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 (among the first humane societies 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 709 dogs and cats euthanized in 2024 and you will recognize a reduction in euthanasia of 98%, a remarkable achievement for this community.

The chart below provides euthanasia statistics for the most recent year (2024) 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 and 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	287	405	692
2017	243	387	630
2018	179	274	453
2019	186	332	518
2020	139	312	451
2021 [see NOTE 8]	111	263	374
2022	160	314	474
2023	248	474	722
2024 [see NOTE 9]	242	467	709

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 formal 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 over time and is considered a model.

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. The Covid-19 pandemic saw a significant decrease in the numbers of animals entering shelters across the country in 2020 and 2021. This appears to have been a temporary phenomenon though it is soon too to determine any long-term implications.

9. Most current complete calendar year.

PHS/SPCA's LIVE RELEASE RATE (LRR): Effective 2002 PHS/SPCA started 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 several more complicated and, in our view, far less helpful versions of the LRR have 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 as 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 <u>not</u> play 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.

Table 2: Live Release Rate (LRR) Report for 2024,
with comparable data (indicating trending) for 2015, 2010 and 2005

2024 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	1,704	1,462	-0-	-8-	234	86%
Cats	2,600	2,133	-0-	-27-	440	82%
Other pets	652	568	-0-	-29-	55	87%
TOTAL	**4,956**	**4,217**	**-0-**	**64**	**729**	**84%**

2015 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	2,764	2,420	-0-	7	337	88%
Cats	2,373	1,871	-0-	4	498	79%
Other pets	882	790	-0-	1	91	90%
TOTAL	**6,019**	**5,081**	**-0-**	**12**	**926**	**84%**

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**	**1,857**	**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, above:

- PHS/SPCA currently finds homes for more "treatable" animals than it does animals who come to us in condition which, by State law, are classified on arrival as already "healthy, adoptable", which reflects the fact that PHS/SPCA receives – and then makes well – a tremendous number of animals who come to us with pre-existing medical or behavioral problems. Accordingly, PHS/SPCA has become one of the larger employers of veterinarians and animal behavior professionals in the Bay Area and relies heavily on tremendous support from 1,000 active volunteers.

- Treatable animals euthanized are available to other sheltering organizations and well-run 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 rehabilitates injured and orphaned native wildlife for three counties: San Mateo County, Santa Clara County, and San Francisco (birds only). In addition to the numbers above, in 2024 alone a total of 4,369 wild animals were made well and returned to their natural habitats by PHS/SPCA.

- These statistics obviously do not include: animals who come to us dead upon arrival (we accept DOA animals as part of our contracted responsibilities with the County); animals brought to us by owners for the purpose of a humane euthanasia due to the animals' obviously failing health and/or unsafe behaviors; and those few animals who arrive in such extremely fragile (mostly newborn kittens) or deteriorated health that despite veterinary medical care they do not survive the initial state-mandated holding period.

As with all things, PHS/SPCA is and always has been transparent about excluding from our Live Release Rate calculation those animals brought to us for euthanasia by their owners due to the pets' obviously failing health and/or unsafe behavior because the Live Release Rate is intended to measure success of saving lives of homeless animals in a shelter's care and who have the potential to be cared for in a home as pets.

We believe that supporting a horribly difficult decision made by a caring owner looking for help from their humane society is an important service we bring to the community. We routinely hear from individuals facing this already extraordinarily challenging decision who are either unable to pay the cost charged by their private veterinarians or simply trust in the compassionate and professional approach they know they will find from PHS/SPCA at this time. This is obviously a very different program than our work in rescuing and finding new homes for animals, but it is indeed work which we feel is an important and valuable service for our community.

Certainly, PHS/SPCA is not unique in providing this service to owners and their pets. And, similarly, excluding these animals from the LRR has long been a common practice for many if not most open-door animal shelters. Shelters have reasoned that there is a fundamental difference in euthanizing at an owner's request a beloved pet now suffering from untreatable cancer, or a dog whose family has come to see that there is no home for the animal who has repeatedly bitten family members despite working with behaviorists. As of 2018, however, that practice is being challenged by some advocates of the so-called "no kill" movement.

Why…? Whether or not there is some hidden agenda behind this challenge, the net effect is that including these animals in the LRR formula results in lowering a shelter's life-saving success rate. That's simply how the math works. And in lowering that rate, many shelters fear a corresponding lowering of public support and trust.

As a result, we now see some shelters actively discouraging the public from surrendering their own seriously ill and behaviorally unsafe animals to shelters for humane euthanasia. We believe that is a disservice to the community and the animals. It leaves people with fewer options to turn to when an animal reaches this point, and it leaves some animals without the peaceful end of life they might otherwise experience.

In addition to shelters no longer offering the service of accepting for euthanasia owned animals surrendered for medically-sound or behaviorally justified reasons, we also see shelters now simply excluding from their databases and reports those animals accepted for euthanasia. This, too, seems like the wrong approach.

While PHS/SPCA rejects the move to add the euthanasia of these animals into the formula, PHS/SPCA not only believes in all of its programs, but it also believes in full transparency. As such, here is a chart which shows the 2024 LRR based on both the

long-standing policy and practice common in animal welfare, and what some are now advocating.

METHODOLOGY	DOGS	CATS	OTHERS	ALL
The methodology PHS/SPCA believes to be correct and appropriate: Excludes all pets euthanized at the request of their owners, as a service offered to the community, because of their pets' ill health and/or unsafe behavior	86%	82%	87%	84%
The methodology some "no kill" advocates have recently proposed: Includes all pets euthanized at the request of their owners, as a service offered to the community, because of their pets' ill health and/or unsafe behavior	62%	75%	79%	70%

To further complicate matters, some groups are now advocating a change in methodology to exclude those animals brought for euthanasia when those decisions were made prior to walking into the shelter, and to include those whose owners made the decision with the help and counsel of shelter professionals.

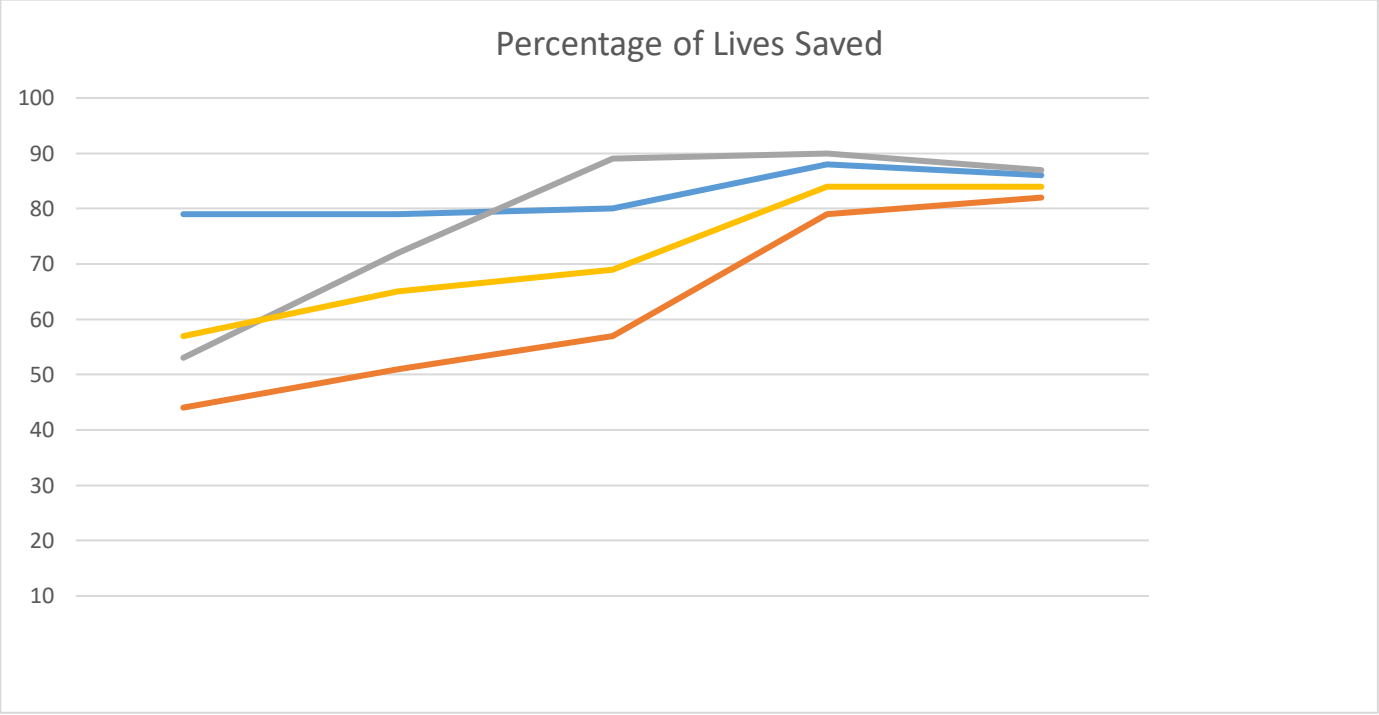
PHS/SPCA rejects all of these several proposed changes in methodology. As it relates to such a serious and important issue as saving lives, frankly we think this is all excessive and misses the point. Most importantly, it does nothing to help the community understand the work of their shelters. However, PHS/SPCA does not hide from any of this and remains very willing to be judged by its record, both at the moment and as seen over time.

To that end, as evidence of an extremely positive life-saving trend, the chart below shows LRR observed over time (using the long-standing policy and practice common in animal welfare which excludes from the LRR calculation the service we offer to provide euthanasia of owned animals brought to a shelter for a gentle death based on the animals' ill health and/or unsafe behavior):

YEAR	DOGS	CATS	"OTHERS"	DOG + CAT	ALL
2024	**86%**	**82%**	**87%**	**84%**	**84%**
2023	85%	81%	89%	83%	84%
2022	90%	85%	91%	87%	88%
2021	91%	86%	92%	88%	89%
2020	91%	84%	95%	87%	88%
2019	90%	84%	91%	87%	88%
2018	92%	87%	91%	89%	90%
2017	90%	83%	90%	87%	87%
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%

Another way of illustrating this is by graphing the data. As you'll see on the chart which appears on the next page, the trend lines are dramatically up at a relatively constant climb. Without spin, without even the opportunity for "fuzzy math," with nothing but the numbers getting the chance to tell the story, PHS/SPCA has a remarkable story to tell.



In 2024, we saved 86% of the dogs who came into our care. In 2003 (the first year we started tracking by this measure), PHS/SPCA saved 79% (live released) of the dogs.

In 2024, we saved 82% of the cats who came into our care. In 2003, PHS/SPCA saved 44% of the cats.

In 2024, we saved 87% of the “other pets” who came into our care. In 2003, PHS/SPCA saved 53% of the rabbits, guinea pigs, and “other pets”.

Combining all animals in 2024, PHS/SPCA saved 84% of the pet or companion animals in our care. In 2003 PHS/SPCA saved 57% of the pet or companion animals in our care.

A QUICK NOTE ABOUT PHS/SPCA’s HOPE PROGRAM: As noted above, over the same period of time (2003-2024) PHS/SPCA has not only lived up to the commitment to never again euthanize a healthy dog or cat but has also committed 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 familiar with our work will recall that it is through our Hope Program that we make well and then find homes for animals who come to us sick, injured, behaviorally compromised, or too young to survive on their own without maternal care. As an open admission shelter, this represents a very large portion of our charitable mission, and this factors into all of the life-saving work discussed on these pages. For 2024…

YEAR	Treatable dogs saved (Hope Program)	Treatable cats saved (Hope Program)	Treatable others saved (Hope Program)	TOTAL treatable pets saved (Hope Program)
2024	639	1,745	207	2,591

Another way of looking at this: Last year, in addition to our life-saving successes with animals who came to us in “healthy, adoptable” condition, PHS/SPCA was also able to make well and then find homes for almost two hundred treatable animals every month, animals rejected by many 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. Here’s one glaring example as to why such a comparison is challenging. First, 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 so called “feral”, fractious, and under-socialized cats who come to us but for whom there are no colony cat caretakers available. As discussed earlier, some 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, an increasing number of shelters simply abandon under-socialized 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, choose 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, one national organization has reported a national Live Release Rates of between 50% and 65% for dogs and cats while another claims an 83% Live Release Rate. Although a broad range, the figure of 50-83% 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%.

By comparison, PHS/SPCA's own LRR (as shown above, along with contributing data) is 84% for all companion animals (86% for dogs alone, 82% for cats alone, 87% for rabbits and all "other companion animals" alone).

For all of these reasons (differences in mission, programs, definitions and internal policies about what is and what is not a successful life-saving effort) in the final analysis it is exceedingly difficult, perhaps impossible, to judge one shelter's LRR against any others. What looks like a consistent measurement is anything but consistent. The Live Release Rates reported by various organizations might appear to be simple and straight forward. They should be, but often they are not. Different definitions and, at times, purposeful manipulation replaces transparency when one scratches just beneath the surface of a shelter's LRR. Here's a true story, presented as an example.

A dog was surrendered to a municipally funded animal shelter by someone who no longer wanted the animal. That dog was transferred from that municipal agency to a charitably funded "no kill" shelter. The dog was then transferred from that second shelter to a "rescue group" which then adopted the dog to a San Mateo County resident who promptly lost the animal. The dog then showed up at PHS/SPCA as a stray. PHS/SPCA scanned the dog and the microchip led back to the person who originally surrendered the unwanted dog. That original owner claimed the dog from PHS/SPCA which was, at the time, unaware of all this dog had been through.

While there's no reason to suggest any of the shelters did anything wrong, in terms of the final outcome it is obvious that nothing good actually occurred; that is, efforts to rehome an unwanted animal through a shelter left an unwanted dog back where he started. But from the perspective of how shelters report their life-saving efforts, this looks like a total of four lives saved. That disconnect is, at best, troubling.

Perhaps even more troubling, when this story was shared with major "no kill" advocates of the Live Release Rate methodology, they saw nothing wrong with the 4-for-1 accounting. Why? As they explained it, no problem because each shelter did in fact *release* the animal a*live*, therefore each obviously a *live release*. While that is perfectly true, if the purpose of statistical reporting is to communicate clearly – if the purpose of the Live Release Rate is to help the public understand clearly how many lives are actually saved – there is a problem here.

SUMMARY: By any reasonable 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.