



The Pet Rescue Foundation

## **Maddie's<sup>®</sup> Policy on Funding Traditional Shelters**

Maddie's Fund<sup>®</sup> recognizes that many private animal shelters believe they have a responsibility to accept all dogs and cats, even if the shelter is full or lacks the resources to provide all the animals taken in with life-sustaining care. For these shelters, euthanasia is viewed as a necessary and legitimate, albeit unfortunate, means of controlling shelter populations, preventing overcrowding, and inhibiting the spread of disease. We respect the views of traditional shelters and understand these views are deeply and sincerely held. However, Maddie's Fund generally does not provide funding for organizations that euthanize healthy (adoptable) or treatable dogs and cats for shelter population management purposes. Reasons include: \*

**Maddie's Fund wants to support organizations whose mission is to cherish and protect all animals accepted into care.** When we adopt a dog or cat into our home, we become legally and morally responsible for that animal's welfare. No one claims a right, much less an obligation, to take that animal's life in order to make room for another. Animal shelters rightly insist that people who adopt from them make the commitment to cherish and protect the animals they take home. At Maddie's Fund, we don't see why this commitment should stop at the shelter door. We are troubled by the notion that non-profit humane organizations must "accept" animals, when "accepting" them means they are likely to be killed. Instead, we feel that the first responsibility is to the animals already under care. And that's why we choose to support organizations that have made this commitment their first priority.

**Maddie's Fund does not believe humane organizations have an obligation to kill animals.** Some traditional shelters believe humane organizations have an obligation to kill healthy dogs and cats – at least as long as there is a "surplus" population. It wouldn't be fair, they say, to leave this job to government animal control agencies. But at Maddie's Fund we don't think charities are obliged to do the government's job, particularly when that job could compromise their charitable purpose. Government animal control agencies are charged, first and foremost, with protecting public health and safety. In many communities that has come to mean impounding stray and unwanted animals and killing the "surplus." For humane organizations to take on this function, at the expense of saving the animals in their care, risks creating, at least in the public's perception, a conflict with the humane mission and purpose.

**Maddie's Fund wants to support organizations that send a clear and consistent message that every animal's life is valuable.** Humane organizations set an example in their

communities, and we think actions often speak louder than words. When shelters kill adoptable and treatable animals, the message they want to send – that each animal’s life is precious – is put at risk. What the public hears instead may well be that animal lives are not that important, and that killing is an acceptable way to deal with unwanted dogs and cats: it is, after all, the way the humane organization deals with the problem. And, rather than educating the community about the value of animals’ lives and the commitment required when adopting a dog or cat, the organization may end up reinforcing the message that animals are disposable and killing is the answer whenever housing or cost become a problem. This inconsistency between what the organization says and what it does risks undermining its credibility and effectiveness in advocating the animals’ cause. By reserving our support for organizations whose words and actions are consistent, Maddie's Fund hopes to ensure that the message we send and the message the public receives are one and the same.

**Maddie's Fund believes that as more shelters embrace the no-kill approach, fewer animals will be abandoned and neglected.** Some argue that only by accepting all animals and then killing them when facilities become overcrowded can shelters work to prevent animal abandonment and neglect. We see it as just the opposite. When shelters kill, many people avoid them and are reluctant to surrender stray and unwanted animals, because they fear the animals will be put to death. Instead, many of these animals are neglected in backyards and garages or abandoned in neighborhoods and fields, to “give them a chance.” By the time these animals are finally picked up and taken to a shelter, they are often injured, ill, traumatized, and debilitated, and many have bred new generations of homeless animals. Most will now be beyond saving – candidates not for adoption, but for euthanasia. And these deaths will only add to the numbers killed, further fueling community fears that the shelter offers not a second chance at life but the likelihood of death. When shelters commit to saving all adoptable and treatable animals in their care, they begin to break this cycle of abandonment and death, and pave the way for the entire community to achieve the no-kill goal.

**Maddie's Fund wants to invest in those organizations that use 100% of their resources to save lives and promote an ethic that affirms the value of each companion animal.** When private humane organizations take on the killing function, vital resources that could be used to save lives are diverted. Instead of expanding adoption, spay/neuter, and education programs, charitable dollars must now go to euthanizing animals and disposing of their remains. Staff morale may suffer as those who committed their careers to helping animals find themselves faced with the daily task of ending animal lives. And volunteer and community support can stagnate if the organization’s actions are perceived to be in conflict with community perceptions of its humane mission. Rather than investing in this model, Maddie’s Fund wants its dollars to go to organizations where the resources at hand are focused on saving lives, and where the commitment to that goal can succeed in harnessing the energy and excitement of the entire community.

**Maddie's Fund wants to use its resources to build a community-wide safety net for companion animals.** With a consistent message and a straightforward mission to save lives and promote the value of companion animals, no-kill organizations bring new energy and solutions to the problems traditional shelters and animal control agencies have struggled with for decades. By supporting no-kills that work in collaboration with traditional shelters and animal control agencies, Maddie's Fund seeks to strengthen the entire community's safety net for companion animals. The job of no-kills in the collaborative projects Maddie's Fund supports is to take animals who would otherwise be destroyed at overburdened traditional shelters and animal control agencies and to provide these animals with shelter, care, and loving new homes. Because no-kills are able to devote their resources to this end – and generate broad community support for their efforts – they hasten the day when no shelter, traditional or otherwise, kills any adoptable or treatable dog or cat, and every shelter provides an example of the quality of care that animals are expected to receive when they find a home. As we see it, that's a win-win for everyone: no-kills, traditional shelters, animal control agencies – and, most of all, the animals.

\* Maddie's Fund wishes to acknowledge its debt to Craig Brestrup, Ph.D., author of *Disposable Animals: Ending the Tragedy of Throwaway Pets*. Dr. Brestrup's work has been invaluable to us in formulating our position on funding traditional shelters.