

The following article by Elizabeth Forel, which analyzes the adoption statistics being put out by CACC, was published in the June 2001 issue of Satya Magazine

Adoptions and the CACC: The Numbers Speak for Themselves **By Elizabeth Forel**

As I opened the brochure for "Adoption Options" -- a seminar promoting shelter adoptions in Pennsylvania -- I noticed that one of the featured speakers was Marilyn Haggerty-Blohm, executive director of the Center for Animal Care and Control (CACC), the animal control facility in New York City. The event, which occurred in May, described the CACC -- i.e. Blohm's methods -- as having "dramatically increased successful adoptions at the CACC" and Blohm as "a national leader in this initiative."

Huh? Did I read that correctly? Is this the same CACC, whose recently published figures in the CACC's Monthly Animal Activity Report for the year 2000 actually showed that direct adoptions to the public stayed pretty much the same from 1999 to 2000 and represented only 8.7 percent of intake. Wasn't this the same Marilyn Haggerty-Blohm who was appointed to this position by her friend Mayor Giuliani in 1996 after a career as a NYC government employee in solid waste management; who had no previous shelter experience before she took the job; whose already generous salary had recently been increased by 12 percent, while the 2002 budget for the CACC had been decreased by 11 percent? [SRAC note: this budget cut was subsequently restored.] Wasn't this the same Blohm who perhaps may be looking to position herself in a positive light now that her benefactor is leaving office? Or had I somehow entered into an alternate universe?

Numbers manipulation is a relatively new practice utilized by shelters that kill animals -- most often animal control facilities, such as the CACC, which contract to take in any and all animals. For most of the 1990s the "No-Kill" movement had been gathering strength and popularity. Sounds good on the surface -- but the truth is somewhat different. Some no-kill shelters fundraise by bragging that they never kill any animals, often not admitting that they only take in animals they consider to be adoptable and only when they have room. They let someone else do the killing without ever looking back. Getting a black eye, losing donations and being called "killers" by those who do not know better, kill shelters soon learned to retaliate in an equally deceptive way by manipulating adoption numbers. It works like this: A shelter takes in 50,000 animals in a year, kills 40,000 and adopts out 10,000. It would appear that only 20 percent of the animals got adopted -- not an impressive number. But if only 20,000 of those 50,000 animals were subjectively deemed "adoptable," a shelter could brag that they adopted out 50 percent (of adoptable animals)...big difference. The balance -- 30,000 animals -- become the "unadoptables" and are not even factored into the equation.

In the end, with both "movements," the so-called "unadoptable" animal loses out. In the first case because he is not even considered worthy of getting into the shelter. In the second case because he is not even considered worthy of being put up for adoption. He is the forgotten one -- the one that under funded grassroots rescue groups often take if he is not killed first.

A Closer Look at the Numbers

Statistics published by the CACC for 2000 indicate they took in 60,838 animals -- up from 59,711 in 1999 and 54,380 in 1998; 45,203 animals were received by the shelters from the public and another 15,635 were brought in by the CACC rescue truck. Of those numbers, 5,280 were adopted to the public, about the same as 1999; shelters and rescue groups removed another 8,994 -- an impressive 31 percent increase from the year before. The real heartbreaking number that the CACC does not want the public to focus on is the number of animals killed. In 2000, it was 41,207, an increase of 3.5 percent from 1999, which was an increase of two percent from the year before. This represents a whopping 68 percent of the total intake of animals. This is the number the grassroots animal protection community must focus on -- 41,207 dead animals -- 113 per day -- five per hour.

But back to the "Adoption Option" brochure and the claim that the CACC under Haggerty-Blohm "dramatically increased successful adoptions." Wondering who composed the brochure, I spoke to Betsy Saul, president of Petfinder.org, a co-sponsor of the event. She proudly told me that she was the author and considered Blohm a leader in this field. She also said that Blohm had told her that in 1998, the CACC had increased adoptions by 38 percent, by another eight percent in '99, and by an additional two percent in 2000. But she was unable to tell me 38 percent of what.

Wanting to give the CACC the opportunity to provide the numbers to substantiate this claim, I left several messages asking for this information. Finally, I received a disingenuous, convoluted e-mail response, whose numbers not only did not add up but did not agree with the "official" CACC numbers submitted to the Department of Health. Percentages were used to make claims, but the base numbers were missing. There appeared to be an intentional effort to manipulate numbers.

For several recent months, I was a dedicated CACC volunteer, taking digital pictures of animals in the adoption ward and posting them on Petfinder.org, an amazing Internet organization that provides an excellent adoption outlet for shelters and rescue groups. I simply wanted to give these animals a chance. Going to the shelter on a weekly basis was not easy. I almost never saw the same animals twice. Once I questioned what happened to 12 cats I had photographed when two days later only one was still listed. I was told that my query bordered on insubordination; that eight of the cats had been euthanized and that if I wanted this kind of information in the future I would have to officially request it from their General Counsel. Fine, so I wouldn't ask anymore -- I just wanted to get the animals out of there as quickly as possible. But management would continue to make it difficult for any caring volunteer to continue with this project.

In March, the CACC began using a new video camera that was intended to photograph every animal in the shelter system and list the "adoptable" ones on Petfinder.org. There were problems with the camera from its inception. The photos posted on Petfinder.org were no longer close-ups; they were very distorted, with bad resolution. In addition, the staff who now take most of the pictures are instructed to put the cats in plastic or wire mesh boxes to photograph them, which gives a bad message -- i.e. this cat is so wild, she has to be confined to a wire box to be photographed. I tried to complain about this to management, but received no response. I also

asked that they refrain from listing some of the more menacing or derogatory names on Petfinder's that the animals' former people had given them, such as Bitch, Barco, TwoFace, Scarface, Devil and Evil. Again, they ignored me. In the face of such lack of caring, I resigned out of frustration.

What we have been doing in this city has not been working. The present impound-and-kill system continues indefinitely because it is institutionalized, politically safe and operates behind a curtain of secrecy. Our politicians have been complicit in this tragedy, accepting the kill numbers as normal, while not speaking out against this slaughter of the innocent.

We have an election in November and an opportunity to get a new and caring mayor and City Council. It is up to all of us to speak up for the animals and make it happen.

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