

The Animal Shelter - what it's like inside?

I volunteer there about twice a week - on my days off from work for 3 or 4 hours each time. I spoke to the staff who work there about euthanasia. They have to put down about 15 to 20 dogs per week - mostly because the dogs will never get adopted. About 80% of the dogs they put down are pits or have pit in them. Very few are dangerous - in fact, it is rare to have to put down an animal because it is dangerous. The cold reality is that nobody is ever going to adopt these poor animals and there are more coming in every day.

I walked through the dog areas - healthy friendly pits were everywhere. Mixed in were dogs from different breeds. I saw 2 small dogs together in one cage - like the fluffy little ones people are always breeding and selling here on CL for hundreds of dollars - they looked bewildered and afraid. There is always a terrific racket going on - barking, wailing, mewling from the cats - the stench is omnipresent and very unpleasant. One gets used to it - sort of. I frequently gag and once went outside and puked. Many of the staff wear surgical masks and some even wear HEPA masks.

The staff at these places are a mix of paid city workers, full and part time, and volunteers. Some of the volunteers do anything and everything and some specialize in one type of animal or are members of rescue organizations.

These places are horribly understaffed and many of the employees are poorly paid but, even so, many are devoted to their jobs and the animals in their care. I regularly see staff working past their schedule (for free) because they are tasked to do too much due to under funding. They care so much about what they do there - that they work after their shift is over - for nothing. And this is not glamorous work. Scooping excrement, washing, feeding, etc. Many take these jobs because of their love for the animals. These people, in my opinion, are to be honored. It is one thing to volunteer. We can come and go as we please. It is quite another to do this day after day.

The city has a curious practice with some of their employees - to circumvent giving them health benefits some of the employees are laid off every 6 months or so and then rehired a month later. Charming. Now you know how the other half lives.

The animals, after a little time spent at the shelter, lose much of their sparkle and become depressed and withdrawn. The dogs take it the hardest. At any moment you can hear them wailing away. As I walked through the dog rooms each dog comes rushing to the front of the cage hoping for some attention and contact. A large light brown male pit sticks in my memory. He was literally shaking with excitement to see a human. He looked like he was ready to explode. The whole room was a mass of conflicting barks and yelps - some of the staff wear ear muffs to drown out the noise. Unfortunately, there is nothing like this for the dogs. Another dog, with most of it's fur missing, yowled rhythmically and shivered. It sounded like a child crying. It went on for the whole time I was there.

I walked past the cat cages. A dozen paws in chorus reached out through the cages to touch something. There must be 100 cats at the shelter. Most will probably never leave this place alive.

There are rats and mice, birds, guinea pigs, rabbits - tons of rabbits in fact.

If you want to add some value to your life and the lives of these animals - volunteer at your local shelter. It is a huge gift to just sit with an animal or take one for a walk - one does not have to get down and dirty with cleaning to volunteer. If you can't own a pet you still can enjoy the presence of animals.

The shelter also needs people to foster animals in their homes. This alleviates overcrowding, gives animals a break from the shelter, and gives people a chance to see if perhaps they would like to adopt a particular animal permanently. It's a win-win situation.

AND, most importantly shelters, and the animals in them, need people to adopt from here. Do not buy pets from pet stores or from people who breed animals as a sideline income from their homes. At least give several shelters a look-over and give a chance to these animals who have been waiting for so long to get back to a family who will care for them.

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