



What Is An Open Door Shelter?

By Doug Brightwell, Director of Williamson Co. Animal Control & Adoption Center

What are key differences in “animal shelters”? Perhaps the most significant is this. **Open-door shelters are usually city or county animal control facilities that do not turn away any animal for any reason.** Williamson County Animal Control & Adoption Center (WCAC&AC) is an open-door shelter for the citizens of Williamson County. When citizens arrive to turn in a “found” animal or to surrender a personal pet, that animal is accepted regardless of temperament or condition. An open-door policy is relevant if people choose to denigrate open-door shelters for not being “no-kill” shelters. Open-door policy determines how shelters operate and whether they are forced to euthanize.

The goal for WCAC&AC and shelters throughout the country is to reduce the number of euthanasias... humane deaths...that must be performed. To do this, we must reduce the massive number of animals being brought into our shelters. There are some simple but very effective steps that can be taken that will help minimize the need for euthanasia.

First, properly identify your pet (s). Less than 1% of cats brought to shelters can be returned to their owners because few wear collars with tags or are microchipped. A greater number of dogs do get returned to their homes because they are microchipped or have a rabies tag on their collar. WCAC&AC microchips every animal adopted from our shelter and is responsible for issuing rabies tags to all veterinarians in the county.

Microchipping is the most effective way to identify your lost pet. A microchip is about the size of a grain of rice and is injected under the pet’s skin using a hypodermic needle during a routine veterinary office visit—no surgery or anesthesia required. Its identification (ID) number is activated by a scanner routinely utilized in shelters. An additional ID method is to have your pet’s current rabies tag attached to its collar. The shelter can trace the pet’s owner by the number on the tag. In Williamson County, it is required

by law for dogs to display a current rabies tag. These two methods greatly increase your lost pet’s chances of returning home!

Another way to significantly lower the number of animals coming into shelters is to reduce the number of puppies and kittens being born. Approximately 70,000 puppies and kittens compared to about 10,000 babies are born every day in the United States. Simply put, there are not enough homes for all those dogs and cats. The pet birth-rate creates crowded shelters and demoralizing euthanasia rates. **YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE BY HAVING YOUR PET(S) SPAYED OR NEUTERED!!** It is

necessary that both males and females be sterilized. Females cannot reproduce alone; there is always a male involved! For every female cat or dog that is spayed, you reduce the animal population by tens of thousands. WCAC&AC requires that every animal adopted be spayed or neutered prior to adoption. We also operate an income-based Spay/Neuter Clinic for the pets of qualified Williamson County residents.

In addition, WCAC&AC operates a pet adoption program which is continuously being improved. When fully implemented, an adoption application/counseling process for adopters and personality/temperament assess-

ment for pets will aid the shelter and potential adopters in their common goal of securing loving, lifetime homes for each pet adopted. **Choosing a shelter pet when you’re ready to adopt and minimizing returns to the shelter of previously adopted pets that “didn’t work out” will also help to reduce the need for euthanasia.**

If we properly identify our pets, spay the females, neuter the males and make good, lifetime, shelter adoption choices, quality of life will be improved for humans and animals alike and fewer pets will have to be euthanized by the open-door shelters who offer them refuge.

