

Zach Bonner and the Little Red Wagon Foundation want to end youth homelessness.



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PETA's Euthanasia Rates Have Critics Fuming

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(March 9) -- When Dawn Brancheau, a SeaWorld trainer, was [killed last month](#) by one of the park's orcas, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals was quick to [condemn SeaWorld](#) for keeping its animals constrained in small tanks. Indeed, PETA is often on hand whenever there is an incident involving animals and humans. The group is well-known for its edgy, graphic advertisements, its support for radical animal rights groups, and its throngs of celebrity supporters, from Charlize Theron to Tim Gunn.

But PETA has a lesser-known claim to fame that has critics fuming: The organization euthanizes over 90 percent of the dogs and cats relinquished to its headquarters in Norfolk, Va. In 2009, PETA euthanized 2,301 dogs and cats -- 97 percent of those brought in -- and adopted only eight, according to Virginia state figures. And the rate of these killings has been increasing. From 2004 to 2008, euthanasia at PETA increased by 10 percent.

The numbers are remarkable in contrast to nearby shelters. In the same town, the Norfolk City Pound euthanized 54.7 percent of its dogs and cats in 2009. In 2008, the most recent year on record, the Norfolk SPCA found homes for 86 percent of its dogs and cats and euthanized only 5.3 percent.



Manpreet Romana, AFP / Getty Images
People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals is coming under fire for euthanizing more than 90 percent of the dogs and cats relinquished to its Norfolk, Va., headquarters. Here, a PETA activist acts out a lesson on animal birth control in New Delhi last year.

"I don't think it could be ethically rationalized,"

Nathan Winograd, executive director of the [No Kill Advocacy Center](#), told AOL News. Winograd, a no-kill advocate, believes shelters should only euthanize animals that are not adoptable because they cannot be rehabilitated for aggression or health reasons. Often shelters put down animals when they do not have enough room.

Winograd and others, like the [Center for Consumer Freedom](#), which is supported by food industry groups, are staunchly opposed to PETA's practices, saying they choose to kill animals needlessly for purely evil or financial reasons.

"It's whoring itself out for media coverage," David Martosko, director of research at the Center for Consumer Freedom, said of PETA. "They'll do the ridiculous stuff, but they won't put an ad in the Norfolk press saying, 'We have puppies and kittens, come adopt one.'"

But the numbers don't tell the full story. PETA says it doesn't have puppies and kittens for adoption because it is not an adoptive agency but a "shelter of last resort," taking in animals that other shelters reject because they are unadoptable and euthanizing those that are suffering. They refer adoptable animals to the nearby Virginia Beach Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals.

"Our euthanasia program has never been a secret," said Daphna Nachminovitch, vice president of cruelty investigations at PETA. "This is one of many, many things that we do to alleviate the suffering of animals."

Nachminovitch brushes aside the idea that there is a financial motive behind their practice. PETA reported an annual revenue of more than \$34 million in 2009. She says shelters don't cost much money to build or maintain, but when they are jam-packed with homeless pets, the caged animals suffer. The culprits aren't [the shelters that euthanize animals](#), she adds, but the breeders and pet shops that fill society with 6 million to 8 million shelter animals each year.

"Money can't buy a good home, so it's not a matter of money," she said. "You could build the nicest shelter in the world, but if you don't have homes for them, they're still going to sit in a cage."

And that is the problem with Winograd's movement, according to PETA. The emphasis on "no-kill" means shelters are overcrowded and animals suffer. Instead, the emphasis should be on "no-breed." PETA promotes spaying and neutering with this in mind and sterilized 8,677 animals last year.

The Association of Shelter Veterinarians recognizes that shelters have different philosophies and methods when it comes to euthanasia and does not provide any strict rules or guidelines about it.

"Our philosophy is that whenever euthanasia is performed, it should be done compassionately and humanely. The decision to euthanize an animal rests with a shelter's staff and should be based on their policies and knowledge of the animal's health and behavior status," Dr. Jeanette O'Quin, president of the Association of Shelter Veterinarians, wrote in an e-mail to AOL News.

Dr. Ronald Hallstrom, a Norfolk-area veterinarian, says euthanasia is a philosophical issue. He recalled a time when animal control brought him a dog with three severely injured legs, leading him to decide to put her down. But when he put the needle into her leg, she looked up at him and he changed his mind. Daisy, he says, is now a "wonderful, wonderful pet."

But not every animal brought to him is like Daisy.

"If you put a value on the life of an animal, you have an obligation to make the best decision," Hallstrom said. "Euthanasia of the animals that don't have owners should be performed by people that are rational and are using sound judgment."

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