

## **New Animal Sheltering Data Indicates 6.5 Million Dogs and Cats Entered U.S. Shelters in 2023**

*North Texas Animal Welfare Organization, Operation Kindness, had a Record Breaking Year in Animal Care*



Photo Credit: Heartspeak

**Assets:** [Photos](#)

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE** - CARROLLTON, Texas (February 12, 2024) – Shelter Animals Count (SAC), the most trusted and current source for animal sheltering data, recently released their Annual Analysis report, comparing animal sheltering from 2023 to 2022, 2021 and 2019 (pre-pandemic). Download the full report PDF [here](#).

In 2023, more than 6.5 million animals (3.3 million cats and 3.2 million dogs) entered animal shelters and rescue organizations, about the same number as 2022 and up slightly from 2021. Of these, 48% came in as strays, and 25% were surrendered by their owners. Shelters across the country are full, and are now entering their fourth year of having too many animals and not enough adoptions—especially for dogs. Because many shelters and rescues are operating at- or over-capacity, the number of surrenders and overall intake is likely lower than it would be if space were available.

In North Texas, Operation Kindness broke past records set by the organization, taking 5,967 animals (3,580 cats and 2,387 dogs) into its care in 2023 for programs such as medical treatment, behavioral counseling, foster care and adoption. That number was 18% higher than their intake of 4,890 animals in 2022. Of the organization's 2023 animal intake population, 9% of animals (534 total) came to the organization by owner surrender while 82% of animals (4,917 total) that came into Operation Kindness' care were transfers from other municipal shelters and rescues. Operation Kindness completed 5,702 adoptions in 2023, a 21% lift from 2022.

*“Operation Kindness is committed to finding innovative and creative solutions to increase positive outcomes for homeless pets,”* said Ed Jamison, CEO of Operation Kindness, *“While shelters are filling up, we know there are people in the community who love animals and want to help. Our job is to connect potential pet parents with dogs and cats that need a home so that more lives can be saved. 2023 was a record-breaking year for intakes and adoptions at Operation Kindness. We're seeing that our shelter partners continue to have a high need for us to transfer animals into our care to help them alleviate space issues and assist with vulnerable medical cases.*

*Looking ahead to 2024, Operation Kindness' goal is to assist more than 7,000 pets through intake and/or transport."*

*"Of greater concern than the volume of animals entering shelters, even, is the ongoing reality that more animals are entering than leaving, perpetuating this national capacity crisis," said Stephanie Filer, Executive Director for Shelter Animals Count. "A total of 900,000 additional animals have entered and lingered in our nation's shelters since January of 2021. That's nearly a million more dogs and cats on top of the population already residing within organizations."*

Although 150,000 fewer dogs entered shelters than cats, 2023 is the first year since the creation of [The National Database](#) in 2016 that the number of dogs euthanized surpassed the number of cats euthanized. Of the total number of dogs and cats euthanized in 2023 (689,000), 359,000 were dogs and 330,000 were cats. The number of dogs euthanized in 2023 is the highest number in the past five years. The total number of animals euthanized was 19% higher than last year's total, 582,000.

Overall, non-live outcomes (including died in care, lost in care and shelter euthanasia) are on the rise since the start of the pandemic for both cats and dogs, accounting for 850,000 animals. Non-live outcomes accounts for 11% of outcomes overall, and shelter euthanasia accounts for 9% of intake.

Non-live outcomes for dogs have increased 24% compared to 2022 (totaling 78,000 more dogs) and have increased 64% compared to 2021 (totaling 157,000 more dogs).

In 2023, 6,010,000 dogs and cats had a live outcome into their community, including adoption, return to field or return to owner. Adoption rates are increasing, especially for cats, with 61% of dogs and cats taken into shelters or rescues leaving through adoption. 2.6 million cats (65% of total intake) and 2.2 million dogs (56% of total intake) were adopted in 2023.

There are many ways individuals can become part of the solution to the shelter crisis in 2024. Animal organizations like Operation Kindness urgently request and appreciate community support, asking that people adopt or foster from local shelters or rescue organizations, spay or neuter their pets, and volunteer or donate.

*"The crisis shelters are facing does not originate within the shelters," Filer said. "Shelters need help now more than ever. This is a community problem that requires a community solution."*

Shifting from buying puppies to adopting homeless pets has become increasingly critical to help struggling shelters.

*"Opting to adopt from shelters or rescue groups not only saves lives but it also sends a much-needed message of support to struggling shelters and their staff," Filer said. "Adopting a pet is also the most sustainable and socially-conscious choice, which helps alleviate the shelter crisis, rather than compounding it."*

*"Sites like [AdoptAPet.com](#) make it easy for prospective pet parents to find any size, age, breed, or species they're looking for from thousands of animal sheltering organizations across the U.S.," Filer added. "And for those not ready to adopt, fostering is also a wonderful way to help, as it offers animals a break from the shelter environment, and lightens the load for overburdened shelter staff, even temporarily."*

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**About Shelter Animals Count (SAC):** SAC is a collaborative, industry-led nonprofit organization formed by a diverse group of animal welfare agencies to create and share The National Database of sheltered animal statistics, providing facts and enabling insights that will improve animal welfare throughout the country.  
[www.shelteranimalscount.org](http://www.shelteranimalscount.org)

### **About Operation Kindness**

Operation Kindness, a 501(c)(3) non-profit animal welfare organization, operates a lifesaving animal shelter and programs to assist people and pets. Founded in 1976, Operation Kindness is a pioneer in Texas for assisting animals in need of veterinary care, companionship and most of all, a home.

In addition to pet adoptions and lifesaving medical care, Operation Kindness' programs provide foster care for vulnerable animals, behavior and training support for pet parents, affordable veterinary services for community pets, a pet food pantry, volunteer opportunities and professional training. To learn more about Operation Kindness, please visit their website at [www.operationkindness.org](http://www.operationkindness.org).

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