

Like Cats and Dogs

Animal lovers fight over Greenhill

For the past several weeks, pet lovers have debated the practices of Eugene's Greenhill Humane Society in the letters pages of the *EW*. Haven for unwanted pets or killer of adoptable animals — will the real Greenhill please stand up?

"It's highly emotional work," says Johnni Prince, outgoing executive director of Greenhill. She's talking about the many hours staff and volunteers put into taking care of Lane County's homeless pets.

And the work doesn't stay at the office. Staff members like Katie Dyer, a former news anchor for FOX T.V. and now Greenhill's director of marketing and development, take home dogs that need a little extra attention and care until they are ready for a new home.

But some former volunteers are worried that staff at Greenhill are suffering from "compassion fatigue" or burnout. This can happen when someone becomes emotionally worn out after caring about a cause in which the suffering has no end in sight.

Prince says this is not the case and that the letters are wrong.

"It's heartbreaking, and it's insulting. You can say what you want about me, but not about my staff and what they do."

Dyer agrees and adds, "Animal people are passionate."

Former Greenhill volunteer and HALO (Homeless Animals' Lifeline Organization) founder Tamara Barnes is also a passionate animal person, and she worries that dogs at Greenhill are "too thin" and that temperament testing is not up to par.

Barnes and others allege that dogs that were underweight and hungry have been euthanized for food aggression.

"Dogs shouldn't look like they came from Auschwitz," she says.

Prince doesn't deny that some dogs lose weight at Greenhill. The kennel situation is

stressful. One former outdoor dog didn't adjust well to living in a kennel at Greenhill and lost 12 to 15 pounds, she said. Staff switched the food and increased the number of feedings.

The Humane Society of the United States says kennel stress is "a marked change in behavior due to stress as a result of an extended stay in the shelter." Sometimes kennel stress affects a dog to such a degree that euthanasia "is generally performed to prevent further suffering."

According to Barnes, "If they are stressed from being in a kennel, then Greenhill needs to accommodate for that."

"Two years ago, Greenhill had a list of over 200 active foster families. The current number of homes stated on their website is only 75. That decline speaks for itself," Barnes wrote in a May 17 letter to *EW*.

Prince doesn't dispute that. "Some policies on foster homes were unclear," she says, and "others were not followed," and Greenhill needed to downsize. "Now we have 75 great homes. We're pretty darn picky about foster homes."

Greenhill plans to add more foster homes "one at a time." Greenhill offers monthly orientation sessions for potential foster homes. The next session is Aug. 6.

Barnes is calling for transparency at Greenhill. Greenhill dog walker Catherine Mish concurs. In her own *EW* letter, she referenced a dog named Paws, who was Greenhill's Pet of the Week in *EW*'s 5/24 issue. But Paws was euthanized before the ad ran. Mish said, "I believe there is a desperate need for a review of the 'inner' operations of this facility"

"What we really want," Barnes says, "is a change of philosophy."

"They need to go to a No-Kill philosophy with no killing of adoptable animals."

Greenhill has a Second Chance program that takes dogs at least four days a week



from Lane County Animal Regulation Authority (LCARA) as well as other groups and gives them a second chance at finding a home. Once the dog leaves LCARA, however, Greenhill has said it has had no way to track whether the dog finds a home or is euthanized.

In an interview in April (*EW* 4/26), Prince said Greenhill would be able to start tracking and publicizing its adoption and euthanasia statistics in June of this year. In a letter to the Lane County Board of Commissioners, Barnes and others pointed out that through their PetPoint Software, Greenhill has had the ability to track the Second Chance animals for some time.

Upon seeing the letter, Prince says she immediately called PetPoint. Her contact at PetPoint, senior manager Brad Grucelski, had not been made aware of the change in software and so never told Greenhill they could now track the animals. Prince was

told that indeed the tech support team at PetPoint had begun implementing the tracking in May.

"If their senior software guy didn't know about it, then we didn't know about it," said Prince.

Prince is concerned that the negative letters in the *EW* will have a negative affect upon Greenhill, a nonprofit that relies entirely on donations. "If they plant doubt in the mind of the community then who has suffered?" she asks, "It's the animals that have suffered."

Barnes agrees. "It shouldn't take public embarrassment to make changes."

The question animal lovers should be asking, according to Prince, is this: "What can we do for these homeless animals as a community? What can we do to fix the problem?"

To contact Greenhill Humane Society about adopting a pet, fostering or volunteering, call (541) 689-1503 or go to green-hill.org To contact HALO email: halolane@comcast.net **EW**

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