



Our Animals

The Magazine of the San Francisco SPCA

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The San Francisco Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals

201 Alabama Street, San Francisco, CA 94103 | (415) 554-3000
Founded April 18, 1868

Our Mission

Our mission is to ensure every companion animal has access to quality medical care, compassionate shelter, and a loving home.

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CEO's Message:



155 years ago, James Sloan Hutchinson convinced lawmakers and the governor of California to outlaw cruelty to animals and to incorporate anti-cruelty societies in California. He then established the first SPCA on the west coast in San Francisco.

At a time when animals were considered only to be as valuable as they were useful, Sloan's actions were both brave and radical. Despite being widely ridiculed for his concern for animals, he stoked the embers of cultural compassion, recruited like-minded citizens, and grew the SF SPCA into a force to be reckoned with regarding animal welfare.

In this issue of *Our Animals*, you'll read about how we continue James' brave tradition of speaking up for animals. Learn about our recent action in the state capitol and the bills we're fighting for, our long history of animal welfare advocacy, and the many ways you can get involved.

Our esteemed Animal Welfare Advocacy Counsel, Barbara Schmitz, JD, shares the legal battle that drew her into animal welfare and why she's passionate about access to care. You'll hear more stories from community members about their pets and the latest on our internship program, CoMET, now in its third year.

Thank you for supporting our work to speak up for animals.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'JMA'.

Jennifer Scarlett, DVM
CEO

How Animal Welfare Advocacy Helps Us Create a More Compassionate World



(L to R) Jenny Berg (Humane Society of the United States), Brittany Benesi (ASPCA), Nancy McKenney (Marin Humane), Jill Tucker (California Animal Welfare Association), and Barbara Schmitz (SF SPCA)

On a cool spring day at the California State Capitol in Sacramento, a crowd of two- and four-legged activists caused a commotion. Their excitement, camaraderie, and wagging tails were an irresistible distraction. Government representatives in formal business attire knelt for a quick cuddle with a therapy dog or stopped to share photos of their own beloved pets.

It was our first Animal Advocacy Day since the pandemic, when SF SPCA volunteers, donors, and employees (along with a pair of Animal-Assisted Therapy dogs) spoke up on behalf of critical access-to-veterinary care and animal-welfare bills. Connecting in such a personal way with state

lawmakers was a high point in a day of sharing personal testimony, answering questions, and reminding officials of our duty to stand up for animals.

Advocates from the SF SPCA visit Sacramento to speak up for animals

Animal Advocacy Day was organized by our shelter policy and legal services (Shelter PALS) and marketing teams, along with representatives from the ASPCA, CalAnimals, the Humane Society of the United States, and Marin Humane.

“The idea behind Advocacy Day,” said Animal Welfare Advocacy Counsel Barbara Schmitz, “is that you have a lot

of people converging on the capitol on the same day to talk about the same issues. It builds a great deal of momentum, and lawmakers pay attention.”

With so many interests competing for attention in the capitol, standing out is key. SF SPCA Board Member Kathy Coffey, who participated, said, “I learned just because a bill makes sense doesn’t mean it will get passed. It takes a whole lot of effort to inform legislators.”

Statewide access-to-care crisis demands change

In total, Advocacy Day brought nearly 100 animal advocates to Sacramento to highlight laws needed to address dwindling veterinary resources. Access to care in California has declined as veterinarians leaving the field outnumber those coming in. A slow economy and growing demand for care exacerbate the issue.

“We are a voice for the voiceless. If we don’t speak up for animals, who will?”

*—Barbara Schmitz,
Animal Welfare Advocacy Counsel*

Concerned about this pattern, we surveyed shelters statewide last fall to assess the statewide crisis. To our dismay, we learned that the majority of shelters are struggling to keep up with demand and are experiencing a cascade of negative outcomes for companion animals, including euthanasia of adoptable cats and dogs.

With animal welfare deteriorating, we’re leaning into advocacy to address the crisis and ensure laws support people and their pets throughout California. “In the past,” Barbara said, “we’ve made the most of specific legislative opportunities. Now, we’re pushing our advocacy and legislation into a whole new level.

“We are a voice for the voiceless,” she said. “If we don’t speak up for animals, who will?”

SF SPCA Registered Veterinary Technician Jessica Bogosian felt our advocacy at the capitol paid off. “We were able to present a united message,” she said, “and help officials see how important this is to their community, not just words on a bill.”

155 years of advocacy at the SF SPCA

Since the first days of our founding, the SF SPCA has worked



Alice Engstrom and Belinda Getler (SF SPCA) at Advocacy Day

with local and state lawmakers on behalf of animal welfare. We’ve helped outlaw cruelty to animals, cock and dog fighting, death decrees for pets who outlive their guardians, and the collection of blood from captive donor dogs, among other offenses.

Today, we’re renewing our work in advocacy to support our mission: to ensure all companion animals receive quality medical care, compassionate shelter, and loving homes.

We’ve engaged the legal system to require humane transport for animals, support pet guardians experiencing homelessness, fight laws denying housing to people with service animals, and other advancements.



Dr. Jennifer Scarlett with SF SPCA Animal-Assisted Therapy dog Brixton in Sacramento

How your support helps us advocate for animals

Advocacy Day is just one of our advocacy tools. Shelter PALS coordinates strategic litigation, conducts outreach to policymakers, and offers free legal support to shelters wanting to improve outcomes for animals.

Recently, we pushed back against proposed legislation that would have denied telemedicine in veterinary practice. At a time when providers are stretched thin, this would have been disastrous for shelters and private veterinary practices already struggling with demand.

Our work in the capitol was successful, the effort failed, and we quickly went into action backing legislation (Assembly Bill 1399) that allows veterinary telemedicine.

Bills to improve access to care, preserve equity in the human-animal bond

Apart from AB 1399 (allowing veterinary telemedicine), we also worked with policymakers in support of several additional animal welfare bills. SB 669 allows veterinary technicians to run vaccine clinics under the indirect (potentially offsite) supervision of a veterinarian, so free and low-cost vaccine clinics can operate more easily to better serve communities. AB 781 requires counties to update their emergency plans to designate pet-friendly shelters during public emergencies.

Thanks to your support, AB 781, SB 669, and AB 1399 were signed into law by Governor Gavin Newsom!

All it takes is your voice

We hope more of you join us in Sacramento next year, but we know not everyone can make the journey. Fortunately, there are meaningful ways to get involved right here in the Bay Area.

To stay informed of our current policy work, visit our advocacy blog or sign up for SF SPCA email alerts at sfspca.org. You can also help by volunteering (in any way you like) or by donating.

“The ripple effect of what we do here is huge,” said SF SPCA donor, volunteer, and Advocacy Day participant Amanda North. “The nation takes notice of what we do here in California. Lending my voice, even in a small effort, can make a difference.” 🐾

Interns Explore Careers in Animal Care, Sheltering, and Veterinary Medicine

The SF SPCA Community Medicine Education Training (CoMET) program is a workforce-development program entering its third year, and once again, young people from San Francisco's Excelsior, Bay View Hunters-Point, and the Outer Mission communities are gaining experience in animal care, sheltering, and community veterinary medicine.

The four-month internship, which aims to bring a more diverse population of young women and men starting their careers in the animal-care field, is made possible in part thanks to a generous donation from #startsmall, Jack Dorsey's philanthropic initiative to fund global crisis relief, girls' health and education, and open Internet development. Dorsey—Block Head, Chairman and co-founder of Block, Inc.—transferred \$1 billion (28% of his wealth) to #startsmall in 2020.

The CoMET program has evolved to offer multiple career opportunities within animal welfare. Interns work with clients in adoptions, behind the scenes in the shelter, assist with veterinary appointments, and support the mobile vaccine clinic. During their time with us, they interact

with staff in veterinary and animal care, behavior, animal welfare advocacy, and donor and client relations.

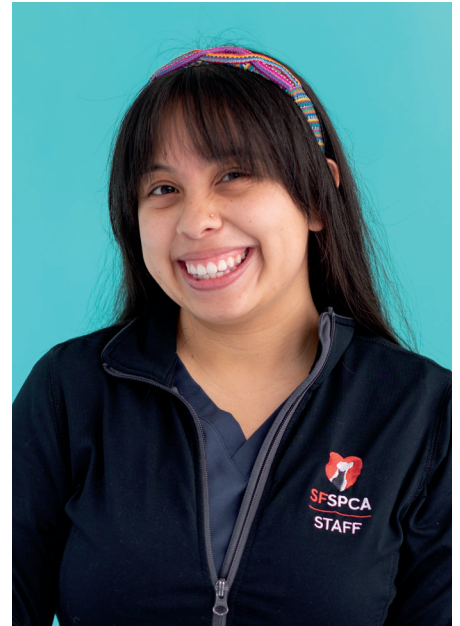
"It's a well-rounded internship, so I can try different departments," said Theresa Rodriguez, who started with our third cohort in August.

"I'm really excited to learn more about dog behavior. It's something I never thought about; how to interact and understand them."

Stephanie Patzan was part of CoMet's first cohort. She remarked, "I knew animal care is what I wanted to dedicate my life to. I applied to the CoMet program, got accepted, and in those four months, I got essential training to kick off my career as a vet assistant."

Following her internship, Patzan joined the SF SPCA staff as a veterinary assistant in community medicine.

It's not just participants who benefit from the CoMET program, communities do too. Interns build bonds between the SF SPCA and their own neighborhoods, raising awareness about our spay and neuter services, free and low-cost preventative care, our hospital, and behavioral specialists. "Our internship is about being able to explore different career avenues," said Registered Veterinary Technician Chelsea Cappacio, who oversees interns in our hospital as part of the CoMET program, "and serve the community you come from in a bigger way than yourself." 🐾



Stephanie Patzan



Theresa Rodriguez

Making a Difference: Advocating for Animals

Barbara Schmitz, JD
Animal Welfare Advocacy Counsel

How long have you worked at the SF SPCA?

Since August 2022.

Do you have pets?

I have three cats: Winston, an orange tabby foster fail; Charlotte, the last of a fostered litter; and a former community cat, Mr. Gray.

What one word embodies the SF SPCA for you?

Kindness.

Why did you choose to become an animal-welfare advocate?

Animal advocacy chose me. When I was in law school, I turned on the evening news and saw a local story about legislation that had just passed at the State Capitol that would address puppy mills. I did some research and learned I lived in the state with the highest concentration of puppy mills. I also learned cock fighting, steel-jaw leghold traps, and other cruel devices were legal in that state. I did not want to live in a state where that kind of inexcusable treatment of animals was sanctioned, so I decided to get involved.

Why did you decide to work at the SF SPCA?

The position was reimagined based on the direction the organization is heading; working to transform sheltering and access-to-care issues in California. At the time, I had a happy career working on mission-driven policy matters for the state. One of my close friends told me about the posting and when I looked at it, I realized this was my dream job.



What's a typical day like for you at the SF SPCA?

There is no typical day, and, honestly, that's just how it is when you're working on legislation. Yesterday was exciting—we had a policy hearing on a bill that we are actively supporting. It will be a potential game-changer for animals and access to care in California.

There were a number of key witnesses present at the Capitol as well as supporters who called in to provide testimony. The bill had support from disability-rights organizations as well as other animal welfare groups. Ultimately, the bill was voted on with very strong support.

What's your favorite part of your work?

I think probably the thing that makes the most difference to me is that I go to work every day with a deep sense of meaning. There are times when working on legislation can be absolutely heartbreaking, but when I step back and look at the big picture, we are moving forward.

It isn't always a clear line, but I have the privilege of speaking for those who have no voice, and I get to work with really

amazing people for an organization that's been around 155 years and is so committed to bringing about change.

How does our focus on access to care impact your work?

When I started working for the SF SPCA, I had worked on puppy mills and more clear cruelty issues. So, from my first day, my role was to catch up and master information about access to care. In addition to doing a ton of research and getting a handle on the state statutes and regulations, I've visited with partner shelters in the Central Valley to see the intense struggles they are experiencing.

That first-hand experience has inspired me and allows me to describe to lawmakers in a much clearer and more passionate way why this is so important. The downstream impacts of overcrowding, lack of veterinary care, lack of spay and neuter resources, all those things we predicted are happening, and it gives a sense of enormous urgency to the work.

What else do you want people to know about the SF SPCA?

We have a focus on dogs and cats, but we were founded because of an entirely different animal. We were founded because of a pig, and that willingness to see every species as important is something we carry forward. I love that. 🐾



Senator Scott Wiener (D-11) with Barbara Schmitz at Advocacy Day in Sacramento



San Francisco SPCA Legacy Society

When you join the SF SPCA Legacy Society, you help secure our lifesaving work with cats and dogs for the next 155 years and beyond.

Enroll today for exclusive member benefits.

sfspca.org/legacy



Celebrating the Human-Animal Bond

The love of animals is a gift; always effortless, joyful, and sincere. Here, our community members talk about the pets who inhabit their homes and hearts and what those relationships mean to them.

Call for submissions!

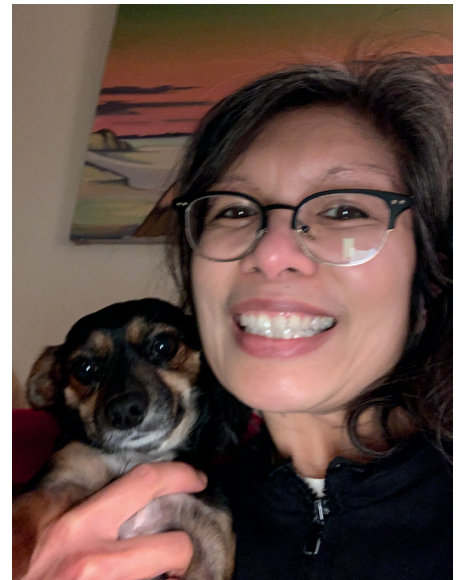
Tell us what your pet teaches you, how you found each other, and, most important, what makes your relationship special.

Send your submission and a high-res photo of you with your pet to publicrelations@sfsPCA.org (subject line: "Our Animals Submission").

Vanessa S. and Chiquita

I met Chiquita on one of my volunteer shifts at the SF SPCA. She laid her head on my lap and looked up at me with her big, brown eyes. My husband and I were looking for a dog, and I knew then I had found her. She brings us so much joy; we feel honored to have her love us.

Chiquita teaches me about what is important. One day, I was coming home from work. I had a bad day and was upset. However, when I got home, Chiquita was so happy I was home and we could hang out. Her presence reminds me not to waste time dwelling over things I have no control over and to appreciate the little things, like being home with my dog!



Cyndi K. and Matheson

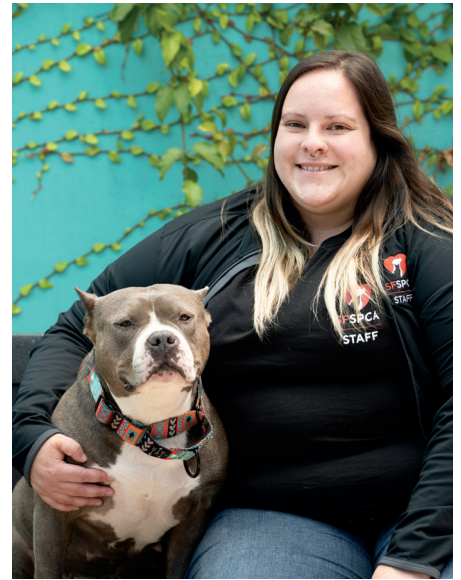
In 2018, our landlord had just agreed to let us adopt a dog. We were trolling all the dog shelters and rescues in the area throughout November and early December. Then, one Monday morning, we spied Matheson on the San Francisco SPCA website. He looked mighty jaunty in his green bowtie and as we read, "Meet Matheson. Despite having only three legs..." and we stopped reading because we knew we had found our dog.

When the three of us are out walking, Matheson will look up at each of us with his goofy doggy grin, and it's then that we know we are a family. He is always reminding us to go out and explore the world and make new friends with dogs and their people.

Anika A. and Pittunia

I lost my pitty boy, Cesar, in 2020. I couldn't imagine opening my heart to another dog. One day, I met Pittunia, who had just come in from a Central Valley intake. I was afraid that I loved her already, but knew it couldn't be official until she met my cat, Gus-Gus. I took her home and held my breath. She walked right up to Gus-Gus and gave him a big kiss and walked away. I knew our heartbroken family was once again complete.

I love how much Pittunia loves life. She's a "stop and smell the roses" kinda gal. She teaches me to give myself some grace, to take a moment and really be in it, and to look on the brighter side of every situation.



Happy Tails

Dr. Jennifer Scarlett, SF SPCA CEO, Dr. Jena Valdez, SF SPCA Chief Medical Officer, and other staff were helping with a spay/neuter clinic in Tulare, CA spaying and neutering 80+ animals over two days, when they met Pancake the kitten. She had an infected eye and was in critical condition. Surgery was performed to remove her eye in Tulare and then Pancake was transferred to the SF SPCA during routine intake. Pancake needed acute care upon arrival to the SF SPCA to treat more infections. She spent two weeks receiving round-the-clock care from our Shelter Medicine team and a lot of love from volunteers. She spent time in foster and once she was healthy, found her forever home shortly after becoming available. 🐾





201 Alabama Street
San Francisco, CA 94103
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