



**Adoption rates are abominably low, euthanasia rates are astronomically high, but if we all work together and play our part, we can change the status quo.**

Over 15 000 dogs are killed in Western Cape shelters each year. Two key factors drive this dire statistic. Irresponsible pet ownership and the lack of collaboration between the shelters themselves. This week, Oscars Arc launches a new bold and ambitious campaign, driven to save dogs lives. NKWP (No Kill Western Province) aims to inspire a conversation on the current status quo, encouraging the public to sterilize their dogs, adopt from shelters when wanting to acquire a dog, and encourage certain kill shelters to collaborate in order that we reduce the unnecessary killing of thousands of dogs each year.

**CLARIFICATION ON THIS CAMPAIGN:** *We fully understand that not every single dog can be saved. Some dogs are so badly damaged or hurt, that the only 'humane' way forward is 'euthanasia. We all understand that and that is not a contention point at all. NKWP is referring to the vast majority of the adoptable dogs that are surrendered at certain shelters every year and that are killed simply because there isn't available space at the shelter, or where the dog does go up for adoption but that does not get adopted (and therefore must be killed). The goal of NKWP aims is to save these adoptable dogs. If shelters collaborated, we can save thousands of dogs lives. These dogs that are adoptable. These are the dogs that deserve that second chance. These are the dogs of the NKWP campaign.*

A personal account addressing some of these issues and the inspiration behind the NKWP is below by Oscars Arc director, Joanne Lefson.

"My life growing up always included an adopted dog which probably explains my extreme passion for their plight. Simba, Sevi, Sheba, Trump, Doekie, Bomber, Fudge, Peter Rabbit, Bennie, Frankie and the one I took around the world for the cause of promoting dog adoption, Oscar. The gratitude and privilege for having these dogs in my life is endless.

On weekends as a kid, I would volunteer at the Cape of Good Hope SPCA and AWS Philippi. I remember so clearly walking up and down those rows of cages, wishing I could take them all, dreaming of that 'one day' when I could have a farm somewhere and rescue them all. The most profound moment of my volunteer experience came when I was about 9 years old helping out in the Cape of Good Hope SPCA clinic and bore witness to a puppy being euthanized. I remember the moment so vividly; one minute it was moving and playing, a few seconds later, motionless. It changed my life forever. From that moment I knew my life would be dedicated to getting dogs out of shelters in order to avoid this unnecessary killing of dogs simply because they hadn't got a home within a certain time frame.

It may have taken 40 years, but that 'one day' did arrive and in 2017, Oscars Arc WOOF Project was ready to open. The mission and procedures were crystal clear. Oscars Arc would pull dogs from these high 'kill' shelters and take them 'to the people'; to WOOF Project's designer container where they could be seen in a positive public environment and ultimately adopted. A customer driven experience with an efficient, effective inspired adoption process was also a key priority. By accelerating adoption rates through the innovative pop-up adoption concept, Oscars Arc wouldn't just save dogs lives, but would also open up additional space in the largest and most congested shelters in the Western Cape.

I called the SPCA first. As the largest killers of domestic animals in the country, this was the 'dream' collaboration that would make, by far, the biggest impact. Upon reaching out to the Cape of Good Hope SPCA, I was politely told the SPCA animals may not leave the SPCA premises for display or exhibition for adoption as per the SPCA Act 169 of 1993. They went on to also say that there were many reasons for this ruling; 'of which most of the reasons are for the benefit of the welfare of the animals'. I couldn't understand how getting dogs sitting on death row out into the public domain where they could be seen and adopted could not be of benefit to these animals. I persisted - only to be met with more and more red tape. Based on their Annual Report the SPCA Adoption rate at the time was just 3%. Of the 10,269 dogs that were surrendered through their doors in 2015, 9536 were 'euthanized'. These statistics were reluctantly provided to me, as a member, upon request. Yes, some of these dogs may not have been adoptable for a number of reasons, but most were. Of that number, how many were and how many were 'euthanized' for lack of being adopted? There were many further attempts 'Just one dog as a trial - a dog that would in any case be euthanized' and the answer always a no. No exceptions under any circumstances. Why was helping to save a dog's life such a mission? Was it easier to kill a dog than deal with the extra effort required to find it a good home with all the home checks and paperwork needed? I also recalled the time of adopting Oscar back in 2004 from the same SPCA. Despite the fact that I was told by the staff member when considering adopting him that he 'only had one day left', my adoption application for him was declined. Thanks to some deliberate and highly determined creative perseverance from my side, I eventually got that dog, saving him from an inevitable fate.

43 countries later, and even a few visits to Disneyland, what a life Oscar.

Despondent that the SPCA had declined, I moved on. When Oscars Arc launched in 2017, most of the cape shelters (Besides all of the SPCA's), were onboard. Most notably, AWS Philippi. Having volunteered there too, I had walked those rows of cages over decades wishing I could do something to change the status quo - and here was the moment. It's hard to express the emotion I had when the that AWS Phillip vehicle pulled up with a van full of dogs arrived at Oscars Arc on the first day; it was one of the best days of my life. Ironically, a few months prior, I had received a call from one of their representatives - whom I cannot name but who still works at the organization- and he spoke in honest desperation. So many dogs were being 'put down' and he was pleading, reaching out to ask if there was anything that I could do to help. You can imagine how excited I was to know that Oscars Arc was about to launch. Over the course of the next three years, Oscars Arc pulled 567 dogs form AWS Philippi, and thousands of others from local shelters. My team developed a strong relationship with the adoptions team at AWS Philippi which was both productive and constructive. It was simply a privilege to be able to help in some small way despite the challenges.

But at the end of 2020, it all changed. I received a call from the head of AWS Philippi adoptions team whom I knew well. The call was short and clear. They were closing down the adoption section and there was an urgent plea for Oscars Arc to help move the dogs 'as soon as possible'. The consequences unthinkable. Committed to helping out as we had for the previous 3 years, we made a call for fosters. 'One of the largest 'kill' shelters is the Cape is closing its doors and we need your help to foster', I wrote. The shelter was never mentioned, the kill aspect was not a lie, and the urgency was well intended to find fosters and save dogs' lives. Within hours of sending the post out on our Social Media channels, I received a call from the Chairman of AWS Philippi and an email followed shortly thereafter:

*We are particularly aggrieved by your draconian "Kill Shelter" turn of phrase that has the potential to cause us serious reputational damage with our benefactors.*

Furthermore, he insisted that I include an unconditional apology to their Council, Executive Committee, staff and benefactors' The letter concluded by stating:

*Whether or not we continue our collaboration pivots on you acceding to the above remedial steps that are to be implemented before close of business today failing which we reserve our right to reply and institute whatever action is necessary to protect and preserve our almost Century old status.*

To keep the peace for the dogs' benefit, we retracted the post and I sent a letter to the committee apologizing that the mailer that had been ill-received. I reminded them that our sincere motivations were always to assist AWS Philippi wherever possible - we were simply heeding the call for help. Why would we ever want to undermine the organization? In the end, despite having all the fosters on hand, Oscars Arc was never given any dogs to be paced with our fosters. The situation settled. Then, when AWS Philippi surprisingly reopened its adoption facility months later, I reached out. 'We remain committed to doing what we can to serve you in the quest to 'home them all' I wrote. A few weeks later, I finally received a letter from the Communications Officer stating that:

*"Whereas before we needed to enlist the help of 3rd parties to help us find homes this is definitely no longer the case."*

Ironically, two days later, I received a general mailer from AWS Philippi stating:

*"The past 12 months have been tortuous and the new year is proving to be equally tough. Surrendered animals (mostly dogs and puppies) increased by 400%"*

Back in 2015 AWSP statistics stated that of the 539 dogs up for adoption, 278 were 'put down' for lack of getting a home. If the mailer was true, how were they now able to adopt out all those dogs under much tougher economic and Covid related conditions? I did the math, it was impossible. I recalled back in 2010 when I had gained permission to film a healthy adoptable dog being 'euthanized' at their clinic. I walked this dog from its cage to the table in their clinic. The nurse injected pentobarbital into its paw and it was dead in seconds. I vividly recall all the black bags piled up high in the back room waiting to be collected. Dead dogs in bags, killed because no home had arrived in time. AWS Philippi was always a kill shelter. Why were they trying to hide the fact?

Yes, there are rules and policies and many serve to manage very challenging situations, we in welfare know that it's the shelters that have to pick up the pieces for the consequences of irresponsible pet ownership and 'PTS' is an unfortunate by-product. The case in point is more that when given the opportunity to save some of these dogs by using 3rd parties adoption agencies, why would the leadership in these organizations deny or decline the opportunity to do so and thus reduce the number of unnecessary euthanasia? It is both unfortunate and undeniable that politics, internal egos, and public reputation takes precedent above the fate of the dogs in their care - a complete contradiction to the very reason these institutions were founded in the first place.

Oscars Arc is committed to presenting a positive approach in order to inspire change in the system. I thought in time, once Oscars Arc was established and we had the numbers, credibility and structure to prove the project worked, we'd convince these old established institutions that Oscars Arc, like other 'supporting' organisations, aren't here to shine above, nor prove a point; we were simply here to team up, help out, and inspire accelerated dog adoption and reduce unnecessary 'euthanasia'. Over these past few years, I've realized that this is wishful thinking; if I thought there was a chance otherwise, you certainly wouldn't be reading this. The fact is that no matter what how many adoptions we inspire, how proactive, positive or polite we are, the SPCA's and AWS Philippi will not collaborate. Public perception and reputation with the public and their donors are the overriding priority- even above the fate of their dogs. Mentioning the word 'kill' 'PTS' or euthanasia is bad for public perception.

Bad for donations. Bad for business. Bad for dogs too, for sure. There is a deliberate avoidance to discuss or publish euthanasia figures in fear that public support and donors would be lost. The figures, if you can get your hands on them, are honestly heart-breaking. But if the public could see and understand these numbers, perhaps they would want to help, perhaps become more enlightened, more responsible pet owners themselves, more determined to change the system?

The purpose of this narrative is not to undermine or negate the work the SPCA's and AWS Philippi do under extremely difficult conditions - they do some incredible work. It is to highlight a few concerns that prevent us all from working together in order to save dogs' lives. When it comes to the certain shelters' adoptions process and strategies- or lack thereof -isn't it time to get the conversation going? Let's talk about the numbers of dogs that are euthanized, 'put to sleep' 'killed'- whatever the most comfortable word is to use. How many healthy adoptable dogs are put down every single day because his/her time was up - and how many of these dogs could be saved if these shelters collaborated with smaller organizations that were/are willing to take these dogs and to find them suitable homes. Let's ask for transparency of these figures in the media and public domain - not to demean, but to encourage change of certain policies that simply don't work or help the fate of their animals. Together, let's help the public understand why too it is so important to adopt and to sterilize their dogs and share the inconvenient consequences of what happens to these 'excess' dogs that befalls shelters when dogs breed.

The NKWP is based on a highly successful campaign in the United States and has saved a countless number of lives. The goal of NKWP is to do the same. Shelters and SPCA's collaborate in the States and there's no good reason why we aren't doing the same here in South Africa. NKWP is calling on you, the public to rise up, for dogs. Only you can change the system. Sterilize your dog and always adopt when ready to acquire a dog. Call and encourage these shelters above to collaborate with organisations like Oscars Arc that are willing and able to home their excess dogs. As a donor and member of the public, you fund their operations and the decisions that they make. They care what you think and only you can apply the necessary pressure that can instigate needed change. We are all supposed to be in this to save dogs' lives and if we work together, we can save many dogs' lives.

That is the goal of NKWP"

**To date, Oscars Arc has saved the lives of over 3450 dogs over 195 weekends. We collaborate with over a dozen shelters who share the united vision to 'Home Them All' and we will collaborate with any shelter who shares that same goal. We do collections, home checks, make donations to the shelters for taking their dogs and also share all adopter information to the originating shelters. It is a fully transparent process that solely aims to reduce unnecessary shelter euthanasia.**

Joanne Lefson  
Director - Oscars Arc

**Together, We Will Home Them All.**

**[www.oscarsarc.org/nkwp](http://www.oscarsarc.org/nkwp)**