

While some animals live happily as cherished members of loving families, others suffer at the convenience of human society. Eri Nishihira, the founder and representative director of the association Animal Donation—an intermediary support organization that seeks to improve animal welfare—describes her organization’s activities and the circumstances that led to its founding.

KAZUKO YAMAMOTO



Eri Nishihira, founder and representative director of Animal Donation, currently in its ninth year of operation

IN PURSUIT OF WORLD-CLASS ANIMAL WELFARE

ACCORDING to Eri Nishihira of the association Animal Donation, while Japan’s economy is the third largest in the world, its animal welfare policies remain underdeveloped in comparison to places such as Germany, the United Kingdom, Scandinavia and the United States. “After welcoming a dog into my family, I learned of many issues concerning the treatment of animals,” Nishihira says. “At the time, in 2010, some 280,000 animals per year—800 a day—were being euthanized. I decided that I wanted to spend the second half of my life working to improve

these conditions.”

After gathering information from various sources, including participating in animal-related symposia and seminars and tours of animal protection centers, she heeded the voices of people at animal protection organizations who lamented that they could save one more animal if only they had the funding. Nishihira’s response was to establish Animal Donation, an online donation site that helps people find organizations to receive those funds.

To help people donate more effectively, Animal Donation’s

strict screening procedure for animal welfare organizations takes into account management criteria such as past activities, revenue and expenditure disclosures as well as operational criteria such as reliability, sustainability and innovation. All donations go exclusively to the specified recipient. The site also allows prospective donors unsure of where to direct their donations to “bundle” their contributions, sending money to sixteen approved organizations at once, including animal protection groups as well as organizations that train companion animals and conduct



Nishihira inspecting a dog shelter, one of the Animal Donation-approved organizations



Board members meet once a year to select new groups to add to their list of approved organizations



Nishihira interviewing a representative of the Animal Welfare and Management Office of the Ministry of the Environment

educational activities.

Launched in the same year as the Great East Japan Earthquake, the website initially struggled to attract donors, but a persistent campaign through word-of-mouth and social media brought a gradual increase in donation volume. Also, perhaps due to the earthquake's influence, the website received a donation from Humane Society International—one of the world's largest animal welfare organizations—of US\$100,000. “This heartfelt donation was delivered to an animal protection organization headquartered in Iwate Prefecture,” Nishihira says.

“Although people pay a lot of attention to the issue of euthanization, euthanasia rates are actually falling. Instead, I would love it if people were better informed about the fundamentals of animal welfare and animal ethics, including how best to interact with animals,”

Nishihira notes. “To disseminate this information and improve access to animal welfare-related information in Japan in general, we are concentrating on holding informational seminars. These include study groups for television, newspaper and other media professionals as well as animal-welfare seminars for families and study groups for college students.”

Because new national and administrative policies are needed to improve animal welfare in Japan, Animal Donation also interviews administration officials on the status of and prospects for such policies, and publishes their reports online. Perhaps because of these efforts, the organization has gained widespread support not only for its donation-gathering activities but also for its extensive information-gathering and dissemination activities and operating philosophy. Donations

are now flowing in from the media and companies involved in animal healthcare.

Animal Donation also seeks to spread awareness about issues facing animals to segments of the public who are not especially concerned about the subject by collaborating with the movie and magazine industries, apparel companies and online media.

Animal Donation plans to add a feature that allows donors to bequeath some or all of their estates to animal welfare and training organizations. They are also considering a mechanism that would allow elderly pet owners to bequeath funds to their pets. Ultimately, they aim to become an intermediary support organization with a role similar to that of the German Animal Welfare Federation.

The ability of people and animals to live happily together is an indicator of a truly rich and mature society. **17**