

## Animal Shelters Benefit from the Oprah Effect

In the wake of Winfrey's show on puppy mills, adoption numbers spike

BY VICTORIA FISHER

When *The Oprah Winfrey Show* aired on April 4, millions of Americans got a firsthand look at a puppy mill. What they saw showed the origins of many pet store puppies and designer dogs in a light they never imagined.

The show featured disturbing footage of puppy mill conditions captured during an investigative report by special correspondent Lisa Ling, and a conversation with Bill Smith, founder of Main Line Animal Rescue, and Wayne Pacelle, president and CEO of The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS).

Perhaps the highlight of the show, however, was the moment when Winfrey—whose imprimatur has skyrocketed many an unknown product and author to fame and fortune—uttered the following words, “I would never, ever adopt another pet now without going to a shelter to do it. I am a changed woman after seeing this show.”

Thank you, Oprah Winfrey!

In the weekend following the show, shelters across the United States saw a noticeable influx in visitors looking to give dogs and cats new homes. An official from the Coastal Humane Society in Brunswick, Maine, said the facility was “inundated beyond capacity with folks visiting” that weekend. The shelter reported that about 60 percent of its visitors said they were visiting because they’d seen the show.

Rochelle Michalek, executive director of PAWS Chicago (Pets Are Worth Saving), says that 100 to 200 people go through the shelter’s adoption center on a typical weekend. The weekend after the show, traffic increased by 50 percent, and caused an additional 15 pets to be adopted. “Seeing reality made them want to adopt,” she says.

Allison Miller, adoption supervisor at Fort Wayne Animal Care and Control in



Oprah's coverage of the puppy mill issue helped dogs like Mildred, a 12-year-old Chihuahua who was dumped by a breeder on a Virginia roadside after she could no longer reproduce. When the Rockbridge SPCA found her, she still had a USDA ID tag in her ear—a dead giveaway of her origins. Suffering from a prolapsed uterus, Mildred was to undergo an operation. But when she was opened up, the SPCA found her reproductive system riddled with cancer, and she had to be euthanized. Mildred's ashes were taken home by shelter manager Karen Beard, who gave her the only home she ever knew. To read more puppy mill stories, visit [stoppuppymills.org/survivor\\_stories.html](http://stoppuppymills.org/survivor_stories.html). ROCKBRIDGE SPCA

Indiana, says the shelter almost doubled its number of adoptions that same weekend from an average of 10 to 19.

Even those who weren't looking to adopt a pet were calling The HSUS's offices to learn more about what they can do to stop puppy mills. “I'm getting many calls from outraged members of the public concerning the puppy mills side of the issue,” says Kathleen Summers, puppy mills program assistant in the Companion Animals section of The HSUS. “Some of them are in tears. They cannot believe this is happening in America and that most of it is completely legal.”

And some of those nearest to the puppy mill issue were echoing the message as well: The Pennsylvania Dutch Convention and Visitors Bureau, operating in a state burdened with serious puppy mill problems, posted a statement on its website calling for increased oversight by officials. “Change can't happen fast enough. What's happening in these puppy mills is atrocious,” president and CEO Christopher Barrett says.

While it's difficult to determine precisely how many adoptions were a direct result of Oprah's show, one thing is certain: Lots of tails are wagging. **AS**