

Nonprofits as a Compliment to Government Services: ASPCA's Response to Hurricane Sandy

When a government responds to damage inflicted on humans by natural disasters animals often go overlooked. Fortunately a few nonprofits are there to pick up the slack. Hurricane Sandy, for instance, was a cataclysmic storm that left thousands of people in need of government aid. State and federal governments resources were stretched by the needs of their human citizens, leaving little to nothing for the equally stressed animal victims.

One reason for the existence of nonprofits has been said to be to account for government failures. A democratic government will inherently serve the majority, sometimes to the detriment of those comprising the minority of votes, or in the case of animals, no vote at all. Nonprofits serve these voiceless groups by attending to their needs when the government can't or won't. For example, in the wake of a natural disaster it is left to animal rescue organizations to tend to the displaced animal victims when government is preoccupied with their human counterparts.

One such animal rescue organizations is the American Society for the Prevention of Animal Cruelty (ASPCA). The ASPCA is an animal rescue nonprofit that has been in full force in New York City ever since hurricane Sandy wrapped the city in its destructive embrace. Founded in 1866, and recognized as a tax-exempt organization in 1921, the ASPCA is the oldest animal welfare group in the United States. Areas of concern include prevention of cruelty, community outreach, and animal health services. In particular, recent focus has been placed on the ASPCA's rescue operations in response to Sandy.

In New York City, the apex of the hurricane's destruction, the ASPCA established a large temporary shelter in a vacant warehouse in Brooklyn to house up to 700 animals. This facility can house animals displaced by the storm, as well as those whose family's situation prohibits

them from providing appropriate care. Additional services the organization has provided in response to the storm include rescuing animals, reuniting them with their families, distributing supplies, and providing veterinary care. Without the ASPCA's response, the needs of stranded and distressed animals would likely either be forgotten or ignored in favor of higher priority emergencies.

Aside from disaster relief, the ASPCA has many other facets of its organization that serve to supplement government services. A prime example is its Humane Law Enforcement Department (HLE). The HLE is a division of the ASPCA whose members are actually empowered by New York State as peace officers to police cases of animal cruelty. The HLE is authorized, among other things, to make arrests, use force or deadly force if necessary, and to carry out warrantless searches when constitutional. Other departments police animal cruelty, but the HLE is the only one who makes that crime its focus. A more clear illustration of a nonprofit as a supplement to government would be hard to imagine.

Clearly the ASPCA serves an invaluable role, a role that, without the ASPCA and similar organizations, would be unlikely to be filled by elected officials obligated to serve the needs of their constituents.

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Sources:

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