ENTRY 1 – 3/24

INTRODUCTION

For my service learning hours, I will be volunteering with Detroit Animal Welfare Group (DAWG). DAWG is a non-profit, no-kill animal shelter and wildlife rehabilitation center in Romeo, Michigan. The rescue services the entire Detroit area, and is the only certified wildlife rehabilitation center that is located in this area. DAWG takes in animals that owners can no longer afford to care for, animals that have been abandoned, injured wildlife, wildlife babies that have been abandoned by or have lost their mothers, wildlife animals that have been illegally kept as pets, and animals that other shelters will not give a chance to.

**During my time volunteering with DAWG, I will also be observing and reflecting on the subculture of animal rescue members, and comparing the group’s values to those of the general culture in the United States. The volunteers at DAWG will be the sample that I use to gain information about the subculture’s population. Although I am not looking to complete the entire process of the scientific research model during my time at DAWG, I will be utilizing the research method referred to as participant observation in order to gather my information for these journal entries. This means that I will be making my own observations and gathering information about the rescue group while also participating as a volunteer myself. The level of sociological analysis that I will be using to analyze my findings will be microsociology, as I will be focusing on the social interactions that the animal welfare group participates in**. Today, I will be attending an informational meeting and training session for new volunteers to begin my volunteering.

ENTRY 2 – 3/24

INFORMATION MEETING AND TRAINING

At the new volunteer training and informational meeting I met many of the volunteers that help keep Detroit Animal Welfare Group running. Kelley LaBonty is the head of the welfare group. The whole operation is run out of her home where she dedicates all of her spare time at home to the animals. Her property consists of her house, a kennel, a chicken coop, a large dog yard, 4 pastures for barn animals, a barn, and small outdoor enclosures that serve as transitional cages for the wildlife that will be released. Kelley also works a full time job at a hospital, however, so numerous volunteers as well as a board of directors run the rescue while she is away. **During the meeting, Kelley discussed many of the things that the rescue places importance on: their values**. **Many of these values placed a main focus on the well being and happiness of the animals.** She also brought up many of the goals that the organization has for the future including a Federal Wildlife Permit, a more consistent group of volunteers, more organization, and an increased audience for their work in order to increase the number of animals that they can help as well as the number of animals that find their forever homes. **All of these goals as well as the values that were discussed are a part of the rescue group’s ideal culture**.

 After this introduction, Kelley and the other board members taught us how to deal any wildlife babies that are brought to the rescue while we are there. This included warming them up, tube feed them, checking their health, preparing formula for them, and feeding them properly. At this point, I started to realize just how much work that there really was involved in keeping the rescue running. The babies alone need to be fed every 3 hours! Next, we got a chance to meet all of the animals that are currently being kept at the rescue. They have two full-size horses, a Shetland pony, a deer, 5 pot-belly pigs, 4 ducks, a rooster, 8 chickens, a fox, around 20 dogs, 3 goats, and 8 possums. Each of these animals has a place to spend the days outside, as well as some kind of indoor enclosure or stall in the barn. I can’t wait to start volunteering at the rescue, and I really hope that I get a chance to work with the horses!

ENTRY 3 – 3/25

FEEDING TIME

 Today was my first day of actually volunteering at the rescue. My job was to feed the barn animals. I did not think that this would be a very difficult or time consuming task, but I was definitely wrong! The first part involved with feeding the animals is going to each of their enclosures and retrieving their dishes in order to clean them out. Next, the dishes had to be thoroughly washed in order to ensure that no animals that have any sort of viruses or diseases pass them on to the other animals. As the dishes were drying, I began to cut fruit for each animal: about 15 apples, 6 carrots, and a couple bags of grapes. I then had to separate them into bowls and distribute grain into each bucket. Each type of animal received different amounts of grain as well as a different kind. Feeding time also entailed clean up, which took a good amount of time as the animals had made quite a mess during the day.

**During my experience today, I realized just how different the rescue group feels towards animals compared to the general population. For example, many people believe that possums and raccoons are just rodents and kill them off, but the rescue values their lives in the same way as any other animal. This made me realize that their respect for the well being of animals is definitely not a cultural universal.**

ENTRY 4 – 4/1

DOGS WITHOUT A HOME

Today I met many of the dogs that live in the kennel at Detroit Animal Welfare Group. A lot of these dogs are loving and smart, but have been let down numerous times by humans. It is very sad to see. As we discussed in class, society lacks initiative and tends to focus on the symptoms of a problem rather than working towards identifying the cause as well as working on forming a solution. **All of the dogs in shelters are in a situation that reflects this societal problem. Many people in America realize that there are way too many good dogs in shelters, and even that there are way too many dogs being euthanized because they cannot find homes. However, many of the same people go out and buy puppies from breeders simply because they are cute. They do not realize that breeders and people who buy from breeders are the reason that all of these dogs are stuck in small cages for years or even killed. They do not care enough to figure out what the cause of the problem is, or act in a way that would help to solve the problem.** This is why DAWG and other rescue groups promote people adopting rather than shopping. There are way too many dogs that need homes to continue to add more puppies to the world. It is a vicious cycle. Kelley explained this cycle in depth to many of us while we were working with the dogs today, and its very sad to hear about all of the dogs who were not even given a chance to have a good life with a family simply because they weren’t the cutest puppy in the litter, or their owners decided to give them up because they wanted a new puppy.

ENTRY 5 – 4/8

THAI DOGS

Today was a very important day for the rescue. Currently, there is an illegal meat trade being carried out across the borders of Thailand, and Detroit Animal Welfare Group has played an active part in trying to shut it down. Well, last week, one of the trucks that were transporting the dogs across the borders was apprehended and prosecuted, and all of the dogs that were on board were taken in by the government. Some of the rescue groups that have been involved were asked to help take these dogs out of the country and find them loving homes, and DAWG was one of the groups that was chosen! As the dogs were recently approved for transfer to the rescue, they made the flight to the US today! Two of the volunteers went to pick them up and brought them to the farm. When they got there, I got to meet the dogs. The poor animals were scared to death and immediately kid under the couch when we brought them inside. **This experience has again shown me how the value that the subculture of animal rescue places on the well being of animals, including dogs, is most definitely not a cultural universal. Just as the video that we viewed in class showed, some countries see no problem with mistreating these kinds of animals and even eating them. Even though many Americans consider this to be a disgusting practice, when the dogs are traded from Thailand, this practice is not seen in this way by the countries that Thailand is trading the dogs to.**

**This also made me realize that even in America, not everyone agrees with the idea that mistreating animals for the benefit of humans is bad practice: even here it is not a cultural universal.** The way that some Americans can treat chickens and other animals that are raised for food is considered to be terrible by people within the **subculture** of animal rescue. Even though some other Americans also see this as terrible and disgusting, very few people stand up for the helpless animals in the way that the rescue groups do.

Disney and Daisy – two of the rescued Thai dogs that found a home through DAWG.



ENTRY 6 - 4/9

BABY SEASON

It is officially baby season! The rescue has been receiving calls non-stop about newborn wildlife babies that have lost their mothers. We are almost at our capacity already, with 25 baby raccoons, 5 baby squirrels, 8 baby bunnies, and even some mallard duck eggs! Feeding all of the babies takes about 1 hour with 2 people, and they need to eat every 3 hours, so it is a full time job just feeding the babies! The raccoons are definitely my favorite, they are absolutely adorable and like to climb up and cuddle into your neck! **As with humans who are poor and homeless, as we have discussed in class, the young animals that have been forced to live without a home and proper food often have stunted growth, both physically and intellectually. For example, there is a deer that lives on the property that will never fully develop mentally due to her emaciation when she was found, so she will always have to be cared for at the rescue.**

ENTRY 7 – 4/15

CLEANING

 Today at the rescue, I worked with a few of the other volunteers on cleaning out the barn and the basement for the summer. The barn looked as if it had not been thoroughly cleaned in at least a year. There was a thick layer of dust everywhere, cages thrown about, and random animal supplies on every surface. We dusted everything, bleached all of the stalls, swept the floors, wiped down all of the supplies that were covered by the dust, organized the animal supplies, and labeled everything to make it easier to find. The basement was also a mess, but in a completely different way. The basement is where the rescue keeps all of the donations that are made as well as all of the medical supplies for treatment. Although the actual medical treatment area was clean, beyond that there were boxes upon boxes of medications, syringes, and other medical supplies. In the other room, there were piles and piles of animal food bags, dog toys, and more crates! This made me realize just how much the rescue is in need of more volunteers. The current volunteers are all amazing and hard working, but there just isn’t enough time in the day for them to do anything other than care for the animals.

ENTRY 8 - 4/16

HARLEY

Today, I finally got the chance to work with one of the horses on the property. His name is Harley, and he is a Shetland pony. He definitely has the attitude of a pony, which he shows by trying to rear up at people and bite them. I am used to this as I have been raised around horses and I know that you just need to be careful and that by keeping a whip or crop handy, you can keep the horse at a distance and teach him how to behave. I also know that it is also very important to avoid any fearful **body language**, as they will take advantage of this. However, I realized that many of the other volunteers are not nearly as comfortable around Harley, and that most of them will not even go near him, as they do not know how to properly use a lead line, a crop, or even a whip. **This surprised me, and also reminded me that many of the volunteers were most likely not raised in the subculture of the horse world, and have never experienced these things that have been such a large part of my material culture growing up. Even though these objects are tools that have been passed on to me by my parents, not everyone was raised with the same material culture that included farm supplies and horses.**

\*Reflecting on this journal entry, I have been able to get Harley lunging nicely and wearing a saddle over the past 5 weeks. I am very happy with the progress that he has made and I am really hoping that I am able to break him well enough for young children by the end of the summer so that he can find a good home. Just the other week, Harley even let a family with kids pet him without trying to bite them!! This is definitely progress. All of the other volunteers are beginning to trust him more and more and start to work with him as well. \*

ENTRY 9 - 4/19

FEDERAL WILDLIFE PERMIT

Although I did not volunteer at the farm today, the rescue got some very exciting news! DAWG got their official approval for a Federal Wildlife Permit! **As I mentioned before, this was one of the goals that was included as part of the ideal culture of the group. Considering that they have received the permit now, they have officially made it a part of their real culture!** How exciting? This permit means that the rescue can now participate in the rescue and rehabilitation of bald eagles and other large predator birds, as well as many other additional species of animals! This approval shows that the rescue is moving up in the political and social “class system” of animal rescue. They are becoming more respected and well known. **If one were to use the reputational method and ask community leaders in the general area about the ranking of different rescues, he or she would find that Detroit Animal Welfare Group is definitely highly respected. In fact it is almost always on of the first rescues that the local animal controls as well as various counties call when they have an animal in need.** For example, just last week, Oakland County called DAWG about taking in another rooster and chicken. This sense of respect from important people in the community makes me feel very good about my choice in volunteer location, and makes me very happy for Kelley and the entire DAWG team!

ENTRY 10 – 4/22

COMCAST CARES

 Today was Comcast Cares Day. As DAWG was one of the organizations that Comcast decided to volunteer with, we had a total of around 50 volunteers come out to the farm to help us! Since I have been helping out for a few weeks now, Kelley asked me to lead on of the volunteer projects. I was in charge of leading 7 of the volunteers in painting some of the outdoor animal enclosures and cleaning out the horse pasture. When the volunteers first arrived, there were some men that were wearing camouflage hats and boots. As I do hunt, I was also wearing my camouflage hat. **I noticed that these men tended to find their ways towards me and showed very uncomfortable body language around the other DAWG personnel. After talking to a few of these men, I realized that this was because they were stereotyping the personnel based on their choice of work. They thought that because we were volunteering with an animal rescue and wildlife rehabilitation center, that we would judge them based upon their clothing and choice to hunt. The men were changing the way that they treated and talked to many of the personnel based on these stereotypes.**

While we were working on painting, I had a chance to talk to many of the Comcast volunteers a little bit more. We were able to completely paint 3 whole structures as well as clean out over half of the horse pasture! Between all of the other groups that were volunteering, they completed: building another outdoor enclosure, planting over 15 donated trees, clean up all of the fallen branches on the property from the winter, put up another fence for a new pasture, and some of the volunteers even helped to brush the horses and the deer!

ENTRY 11 - 4/23

BROKEN PROMISES

Today, Kelley also told me about another situation that the rescue is currently encountering. As DAWG is one of the few rescues that is willing to take in dogs with behavioral issues – including dogs that are not friendly towards other dogs or even most humans, many of the animals that are adopted out are required to be adopted into a home where they are the only pet, or where the new owners agree not to take the dog out without a leash. Well, about a year ago, someone adopted one of the dogs with aggression issues. The dog was very good with most situations, but was known to attack runners, as he felt threatened. When the person chose to adopt him, the rescue made her agree to keep him leashed whenever he was outside. However, they did not stay true to this agreement, and allowed the dog off of his leash in a local park. While they were there, a runner passed by the dog, and sure enough, he bit the man. When this occurred, the dog was taken away by the county animal control and is currently on probation. His temperament will be tested and if he does not pass the tests, he will be immediately euthanized. This is the last thing that any rescue wants to hear about one of their animals. This makes me feel very upset. It is not the dogs fault that the owners failed to respect what DAWG had told them, and now he will pay the price for their mistake. **The adopters are now receiving many negative sanctions from members of the rescue as well as the rest of the rescue community for disregarding the rescue’s norms and values. The adopter ignored specific instructions and put the dog’s life in danger by doing so.**

ENTRY 12 - 4/24

IN CONCLUSION

**After volunteering with Detroit Animal Welfare Group for the last 5 weekends, I have learned much more about the real culture of the rescue group. As with most real cultures, that of DAWG does fall short of their ideal culture, however they are definitely making great strides towards their goals.** I have really come to respect all of the people who volunteer with and work with DAWG, and will definitely be continuing my volunteering on the weekends. In addition to this, Kelley has actually offered me a real, paying position with the group during the week! **This is one way that she has reacted with positive sanctions based on the work that I have done on the farm and with the horses that supports and follows their values and norms.** **In addition to the job offer, Kelley has also shown her appreciation towards other volunteers and myself with positive sanctions through various Facebook posts.** I am super excited to start working with the welfare group on a more regular basis and to learn more and more about the various types of animals that are brought there. One day I hope that I can find a job that is as rewarding and enjoyable as this job truly is. Although over the past weeks, I have experienced the death of various animals that were brought to us to late to help, I have also been able to take part in saving so many more. It has been incredible.

As I continue with my volunteer work at Detroit Animal Welfare Group, I will be participating in Empty The Shelters day on Saturday, April 29, I will be working towards breaking the horses in order to help get them adopted, and I will be trying to raise the funds to build a much larger barn through fundraisers and donations. If anybody else were to ask me where he or she should complete his or her service hours, I would definitely recommend completing the hours through DAWG. It has been an amazing experience and I am very glad that I chose to complete my service through them. **In addition to enjoying my time at DAWG, the experience has also allowed me to observe the way that those involved in the subculture of animal rescue work together and how the different organizations stand up for and support one another**. There have been various times those other rescues have called Kelley while I was there, to ask her for advice or to take in animals that they were unable to at the time. Additionally, through Facebook, all of the rescues in the area work together to share stories, to promote fundraisers, and to find loving homes for different animals.