Call him the other Che.

You won’t find his face on T-shirts, and he’s not a universally recognized symbol of rebellion like that Guevara guy, but Che Green is helping to lead something of a revolution in the world of animal welfare.

Green serves as executive director of the Humane Research Council (HRC), a decade-old nonprofit that aims to empower animal advocacy groups by showing them how to use research to work more effectively. Based in Olympia, Wash., the HRC helps its client organizations evaluate their programs. It also conducts independent studies, and pulls together existing research on animal-related topics, which it posts on its website, humanespot.org.

Using research to promote animal welfare sounds sensible, but it isn’t always the norm in a field where basic data—such as the number of animals euthanized yearly in the U.S.—can be difficult to pin down. Green brings a business background to animal advocacy; before founding the HRC, he worked as an investment banker and crunched numbers for Microsoft. A longtime vegetarian, Green decided to get more involved in animal advocacy after becoming aware of the Makah tribe’s whale hunt in the Pacific Northwest. “I knew at that point that I wanted to devote more time to [advocacy], but I didn’t really find a role that I felt was good for me, given my background,” he recalls. “So … like many people do, I started my own organization.”
founders of organizations are driven by passion, but don't necessarily have a lot of business acumen or strategy background. I think this new group of activists coming on and bringing some of that skill set is important. I bring a little bit of that to the Humane Research Council.

Can you walk us through the process for a typical HRC client?

It's hard to say who is a "typical" client; they're all very different. But we work a lot with the ASPCA, and one of the projects that we did involved the tagging and microchipping of animals. We did a pilot study where we called people post-adoption, and we asked about their habits in terms of tagging and ID'ing, and also how many people had lost an animal, reclamation, things of that sort. We walked through a series of questions that showed definitively that tagging—specifically putting on a collar and an ID tag—was demonstrably powerful in terms of getting animals returned to their people. That got some pretty good coverage, but more importantly, shelters are now implementing that.

How can people who work for shelters and rescues benefit from the work you do?

I would certainly start with our free resources. [Our website] provides a centralized database of all the animal-related research that we can find. If a shelter is starting a new campaign ... or if they want to learn about the demographics in their area and how it relates to animal issues, they would go to this website and use that as their first stop—just to do an information-gathering exercise before they go off

In the edited interview that follows, Green discusses his work with Animal Sheltering associate editor James Hettinger.

Animal Sheltering: How does your business background influence the way you approach the work you do now?

Che Green: One of the things that’s missing in the animal movement—and less so now than 15 years ago—is that other side of the brain. Most of the people who are founders of organizations are driven by passion, but don't necessarily have a lot of business acumen or strategy background. I think this new group of activists coming on and bringing some of that skill set is important. I bring a little bit of that to the Humane Research Council.

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and reinvent the wheel, perhaps, when they
don’t need to.

Research needs to be commensurate
with the importance [of the issue] to an
organization, so if it’s a particularly important
program, campaign, or question, they might
work with us one-on-one. As a nonprofit,
we’re much less expensive than most of the
commercial research providers out there.

Do you notice any trends in the type
information your clients are looking for?
I notice that clients are getting more and
more sophisticated, that’s for sure. The
belief in the importance of data, and the
respect for data in terms of strategic de-
cision-making, has grown astronomically
just in the past decade. Particularly in the
sheltering world, you’ve got a couple of
different models of data collection and
how you organize your data, but they’re all
moving in the same direction, which is get-
ing more robust information about shel-
tering operations. So whether it’s Asilomar
Accords, whether it’s Maddie’s Fund, or
whether it’s the ASPCA Dashboard, all of
these things are doing a good thing in that
they’re codifying how groups can get their
information into one place.

With Maddie’s Fund, they’re making all
of that [data] public, so groups can bench-
mark against themselves and against each
other. It’s a wonderful tool to compare like
communities against each other and see
who’s doing well, who’s not doing as well,
and why, and try to figure out what the
dynamics are there. We’ve got a long way
to go, but I think this sort of data aware-
ness is a lot stronger than it used to be.

Has anything surprised you as you’ve
gotten into this kind of work?
The arc of the data awareness. We had
a really difficult time convincing groups,
when we first started the Humane
Research Council, to invest in research,
and to believe in data as a guiding force.
That has become much easier. Now, we’re
not a huge team, we’re not growing by
leaps and bounds, but we’re finding [that]
we don’t have to go look for clients any-
more; they’re looking for us.
Another thing you hear about animal welfare research is that it’s tainted because it comes from an advocacy group, or it’s slanted in some way. That’s something you try to address as well? It is. Just flat out, we do not do biased research, and so if clients come to us with a research outcome that they want, we will steer them in another direction, just because we think that that’s bad for the movement—especially for our organization, where we’re trying to carve out a space where we can be credible and objective.

How have you found this work, compared to, say, working for Microsoft? It’s a bit of a mixed bag. It’s far more rewarding. The reason I left Microsoft after just a couple of years is because it’s hard to get motivated to sell software, at least for me. But it’s not hard to get motivated to try to help groups help animals more effectively. I’m very motivated by the work I do. I’m very lucky to be in a position to do this work full time. So it’s much better for me personally, but it’s also a much bigger problem. It’s a lot easier to sell software. It’s a lot harder to convince people to be humane.

Of the projects that you’ve worked on, do any stand out as being particularly interesting or rewarding?
We did a study with the New England Anti-Vivisection Society in terms of public opinion of captive chimpanzees. We received some really positive feedback from people—not surprising, because people love chimpanzees—and that was able to be used to pretty good effect with the media and with the public. And they still quote those statistics today, even though that research is now three or four years old. It moved into being part of their Release Chimps campaign, and there’s a lot of positive movement around the Great Apes Act. It’s gratifying to have been a small part of that progress.

And you’ve worked with The HSUS on a couple of projects?
One that was really exciting was the Humane Index [available at humaneindex.com]. It’s the HSUS project where they ranked the top 25 metropolitan statistical areas according to 15 different metrics. We pulled together data on everything from the number of hunters in a metropolitan area to the number of vegetarian restaurants, so we had a very diverse set of animal-related metrics. We added them up, scored them, and ranked the cities.

Is there a story behind your first name? Were you named after Che Guevara?
I was, yes. There’s some conflict between my parents in terms of whether it was because they liked the name or because they supported the man, but Che Guevara is my namesake. It gets mixed reactions from people, but I’m very pleased with it.

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