



Richmond SPCA: Rehoming Services



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professionals: www.ASPCApro.org.

Richmond SPCA: Re-homing Services



In 2001, as part of the campaign to end the killing of healthy homeless animals in Richmond, the Richmond SPCA began identifying and addressing the primary factors contributing to shelter intake.

Since owner turn-ins accounted for a high percentage of cats and dogs ending up in the shelter, the organization decided to help pet owners find good new homes for the animals they could no longer keep. The Richmond SPCA's Re-Homing Packet provides owners with everything they need to re-home their own pets.

Stats

In 2006, 916 pets were placed by their owners using the re-homing service. Between 2002 and 2006, the program kept 3,724 animals out of the shelter.

How Cool is That?

We're impressed with the way this program puts the responsibility for re-homing pets where it belongs, with the owners who can no longer keep them. At the same time, we're impressed with the way the Re-Homing Packet guides owners through a very responsible placement process and provides extensive, user-friendly resources to encourage them to do the job right.

Adopt or Adapt

A Re-Homing Services program costs very little to put in place and is an excellent first step in reducing shelter intake.

Richmond SPCA: The Whole Story

Helping pet owners find good new homes for their animals

In 2001, the Richmond SPCA began seeking ways to eliminate euthanasia of healthy homeless animals in their own shelter and throughout the city. To accomplish their goal, it was essential to engage the public, encouraging people to take greater responsibility for the animals in their own lives and providing them with the resources to do so.



Taking inspiration from pet retention programs at the Monadnock Humane Society in New Hampshire and Maricopa County Animal Care & Control in Arizona, the Richmond SPCA developed Project Safety Net, a sweeping program agenda designed to address frequent causes of relinquishment. Re-homing Services are an important Safety Net component.

What's Behind the Program

According to CEO Robin Starr, Richmond SPCA leaders were struck by the fact that people giving up pets for one reason or another seemed to find it appropriate to turn them in to the shelter without investigating other alternatives. The organization wanted to enforce the idea that pet owners are responsible for their animals, including those they can no longer keep. While the Richmond SPCA was ready to serve as a resource to help with re-homing, they wanted to make it clear that a shelter should be viewed only as a last resort.

Now, when an owner calls wanting to bring in a pet, the admissions counselor schedules an appointment to bring the animal in but also asks what efforts have been made to re-home the animal and sends a Re-homing Packet. The packet includes an introductory sheet that advises "It is much better for your pet to find a loving home without him or her ever having to enter an animal shelter".

In an effort to keep the animal in its home, the owner is informed about Richmond SPCA spay/neuter and behavior programs as well as the Pet-Friendly Housing Guide. For those situations when re-homing is the only option, resources are provided to help the owner handle the adoption without going through the shelter. There are instructions for putting together engaging marketing materials and getting the word out. Owners are encouraged to submit a photo and write-up for display on the engaging Richmond SPCA website and on a bulletin board at the shelter. Questionnaires like the ones used by adoption counselors at the shelter are included to help owners identify the pet's needs and seek out homes where those needs will be met. Also included are instructions for screening applicants and following up to make sure the placement is a good one.

[Ingredients and Prep Work](#)
[Step by Step](#)
[Results](#)
[Some Words of Wisdom](#)

Ingredients and Prep Work

People

The Re-Homing Services are administered by the admissions staff. A member of the development staff manages the website.

Up-front Costs and Start-up Funding

There are no expenses associated with this program except the printing of the forms in the packet. Having a website where pets can be posted increases visibility dramatically (the Richmond SPCA's Re-homing page averages 51,873 hits annually or roughly 4,500 a month). You could start the program, however, with a bulletin board in the shelter.

Timeline

It requires very little time to get these services in place.

Step by Step

Here are the steps the Richmond SPCA used to institute Re-homing Services.

1. They developed the Re-homing Packet.

The Richmond SPCA's materials can easily be adapted to your organization.

2. They trained the admissions staff.

According to Starr, training the admissions staff is key. At the Richmond SPCA, the Re-homing Services program is part of the larger Surrender Counseling Program. Admissions staff are trained to have non-judgmental conversations with individuals who are planning to bring in animals so they can recommend appropriate alternatives to relinquishment.

3. They put in place a system for tracking the animals served through Re-Homing Services.

Richmond SPCA staff keep track of the animals on the appointment list. If an appointment is canceled or the owner just fails to show up, they find out why. This enables them to track the success of their counseling and re-homing services.

Results

According to Starr, 916 companion animals were placed through the Re-homing Services in 2006. Since the program began in 2002, 3,724 animals have been placed without having to enter the shelter. (These figures do not include animals whose owners posted them on the website directly without going through the admissions desk).

In addition, Starr sites the educational impact of the program – re-enforcing the idea that the Richmond SPCA is a resource and a partner, not a dumping ground, shifting the responsibility back to the owner, and making it clear that owners do have options.

Critical Factors

- Qualified staff. According to Starr, admissions counselors have to be comfortable giving control back to the owners and they have to have the skills necessary to communicate effectively in a pleasant and non-judgmental manner.
- Requiring that animals be altered and up-to date on rabies vaccinations before they can be posted on the website or bulletin board. This re-enforces two key messages, the need for spay/neuter and the need to provide pets with basic veterinary care.
- Calling people back to see what happened to their pets and keeping records.

Thinking Outside the Box

According to Starr, animal welfare staff often complain about the way people use shelters as dumping grounds for their pet problems, but they don't do anything to stop it. This program recognizes that, for generations, humane societies have been enablers. It is therefore necessary for us to re-educate the public to take responsibility for the animals in their lives and to give them the tools to do the work we have been doing for them.

How They Feel About What They Did

Starr considers Re-homing Services one of the most important elements in Project Safety Net. “By providing people with ideas and resources, we educate the public that the shelter is no place for their pets and that they can and should re-home the animals themselves”.

Some Words of Wisdom

Be Prepared For

- For most people, learning that they can and should re-home their own animals is an “AHA!” moment. According to Starr, few people are hostile when asked to take on the re-homing responsibility. Most just hadn’t thought about it and have no idea how to go about it. They just always looked to the shelter as “the answer for all things animal-related”.
- Some people really don’t have the time or the energy to re-home their pets. For them, the shelter is the only answer.

Next Steps

Streaming video? According to Starr, the Richmond SPCA is always exploring new technology that might help them get animals placed in good homes.

Richmond SPCA: Thumbnail Sketch

Richmond SPCA
Robin Starr: CEO
2519 Hermitage Road
Richmond, VA 23220

www.richmondspca.org

The Richmond SPCA is a No Kill humane society dedicated to the principle that every life is precious. Since 1999, the organization has worked to make Richmond one of the safest cities in the United States for homeless animals. In addition to adopting a new and progressive operating model that includes aggressive pet retention, rehabilitation, adoption, spay/neuter, and humane education programs, the Richmond SPCA developed cooperative arrangements with the City of Richmond and other area sheltering organizations to create an environment in which all animals ending up in shelters would have a much stronger chance for survival. As a result, no healthy homeless cat or dog died in Richmond in 2006.

The Richmond SPCA is currently partnering with the ASPCA on Mission Orange, a national initiative to train and support other cities across the country interested in becoming humane communities.

Stats

From Oct. 1, 2005 to Sept. 30, 2006, the Richmond SPCA:

- Saved the lives of 4,325 animals through adoption, re-homing and behavioral assistance programs. (as of July of 2007, 13,832 pets' lives had been saved since the organization became No Kill in 2002)
- Rehabilitated approximately 2,300 sick and injured pets
- Achieved a citywide save rate of 76%, giving Richmond one of the lowest euthanasia rates in the country
- Spayed or neutered 11,017 animals in their on-site clinic
- Delivered 8,512 hours of humane education to area school children and 3,060 hours of adult education

Staff

43 full time. 43 part time

Operating Budget

\$3.3million

Business Type

501(c) (3) nonprofit



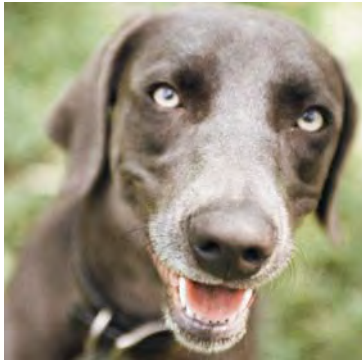
Richmond SPCA: Surrender Counseling



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Richmond SPCA: Surrender Counseling

Nonjudgmental conversations about relinquishment



In 2001, as part of their pledge to end the killing of healthy homeless animals in the city, the Richmond SPCA began developing a network of programs designed to keep animals in their homes and out of shelters. Surrender Counseling was developed to identify real reasons for relinquishment and direct owners to good alternatives through meaningful, nonjudgmental conversations.

Stats

In 2006, 2,600 people were counseled.

How Cool is That?

As animal welfare professionals, it's easy to become angry at those who relinquish pets. We're impressed with the attitude adjustment that enables the Richmond SPCA staff to get past the anger, explore the reasons for relinquishment, and work with owners to find workable alternatives.

Adopt or Adapt

While Surrender Counseling costs nothing to implement, it does require extensive training. It is also helpful to have good alternatives such as behavior training, low-cost spay/neuter, a guide to pet-friendly housing, and re-homing services to offer. Encouraging staff to be non-judgmental and giving them the tools to help people with their pet problems is an essential step in creating a lifesaving partnership with the public.

Richmond SPCA Surrender Counseling: The Whole Story

In 2001, the Richmond SPCA began working actively to end euthanasia of healthy homeless cats and dogs in their facility and throughout the city. An essential first step was reducing the number of animals coming into the shelter.

In a dramatic shift, the Richmond SPCA stopped taking every animal that came in the door, instituted an appointment system and developed an array of resources, including Surrender Counseling, designed to uncover the real reasons for relinquishment and help people find good alternatives.



[How the Program Works](#)
[Ingredients and Prep Work](#)
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What's Behind the Program

As a symbol of the change, the name of the Surrender Desk was changed to Admissions Desk implying a process and a privilege rather than a right.

Now, when an individual comes to the shelter or calls about bringing in an animal, a Richmond SPCA staff member engages the person in a scripted, open-ended conversation. The goals of the conversation are to forge a positive relationship, get at the real reasons for relinquishment and offer resources and solutions that will keep the animal out of the shelter. According to CEO Robin Starr, even when that isn't possible, the counseling process provides an important opportunity for community education and builds good will for the organization.

Surrender Counseling is the cornerstone of Project Safety Net, a sweeping program agenda designed to address the most frequent causes of pet relinquishment. Project Safety Net was built on programs developed at Monadnock Humane Society (West Swanzey, NH) and Maricopa Animal Care & Control (Phoenix, AZ).

Ingredients and Prep Work

Prerequisites

People

- Staff members open to a dramatic shift in their approach to people who plan to surrender animals.
- A qualified person to develop the counseling questions and train the staff.

Up front costs and start-up funding

The only cost associated with this program is staff training. If there isn't anyone in house who can train, the Richmond SPCA recommends turning to national organizations to see if they can send in a trainer.

Timeline

According to Starr, getting the program up and running took about six months of training. While the Richmond SPCA trained the entire staff so that everyone would know the direction the organization was taking, Starr now says it might have been better to begin by training just the admissions staff in order to speed up the launch.

Step by Step

Here are the steps the Richmond SPCA followed to implement Surrender Counseling.

1. They developed a questionnaire to guide counselors' conversations.

According to Starr, having a questionnaire at the admissions desk not only creates a record of the conversation but also enables anyone who answers the phone or greets a visitor to start the process. The questions should be open-ended and designed to start a non-judgmental, personal conversation about the animal and the reasons for relinquishment. Starr stresses that the counselor should refer to the animal by name throughout the conversation. Questions should cover a wide range of potential trouble spots. Some examples:

- Why can't you keep Name ?
- Would you be interested in keeping Name if you had the resources?
- Have you had any behavioral problems with Name?
- Have you tried to find a home for Name?

In addition to uncovering the problem that has brought the person to the shelter, the questions should teach about the responsibilities of pet ownership in a non-threatening manner.

2. They trained the staff.

According to Starr, the decision to stop killing healthy homeless animals, and the implementation of programs to make that possible, required a total change in mind-set on the part of the staff. Instead of the traditional negative view of the public as the ones responsible for animal suffering, the staff had to embrace the ideas that people are basically good and want to help; that the behaviors they find so reprehensible in the public are often the result of ignorance; and that, given the skills and resources, people will do the right thing. In short, they had to learn to trust the public. That took time.

The Richmond SPCA trained their staff to do Surrender Counseling in-house using the Dumb Friends League's (Denver, CO) Pets for Life materials. Weekly training sessions over a six month period included basic customer service skills, extensive education about dog and cat behavior, techniques for dealing with typical behavior problems, and information about community resources such as breed rescue groups or dog trainers. According to Starr, the training included a lot of role-playing to get staff members comfortable with the conversational techniques.

Now that the program is in place, new counselors learn by shadowing experienced staff members for a number of weeks. Once they begin counseling, they are observed for a week or two and given guidance as needed.

3. They put in place resources for counselors to recommend as alternatives to surrender.

The Richmond SPCA developed Surrender Counseling before they put other Project Safety Net programs in place. Starr, however, recommends creating some resources designed to address major causes for relinquishment before launching the counseling program. These might include a Pet-Friendly Housing Guide, Re-Homing Services, Foster-to-Surrender, Behavior Helpline, manners classes or some kind of spay/neuter assistance. According to Starr, however, all you really need to get started is a knowledgeable staff willing to listen.

Results

- Surrender Counseling impacts every person who calls or comes to the Richmond SPCA to inquire about relinquishing an animal. In 2006, 2,600 people received Surrender Counseling.
- Staff morale improved.

According to Starr, empowering the admissions staff to become counselors and providing them with tools to do it effectively gave them a whole new approach to their work. Instead of feeling

powerless and angry in the face of “irresponsible people dumping animals on them,” staff members were able to get past the anger, analyze the reasons for the decisions to relinquish, and work with pet owners to find workable alternatives. They began defining themselves as professionals who could help people with their pet problems. According to Starr, that is viewed as “a great job”. “If we treat staff as pooper scoopers, they will be pooper scoopers,” Starr remarks, “If we treat them like professionals, they will be professionals.”

- The public perception of the humane society changed.

According to Starr, the Richmond SPCA receives a lot of positive feedback from people who are helped through the counseling. Instead of viewing the humane society as the place that has to take animals nobody wants, the organization is now viewed as a partner and a resource working to solve a community-wide problem.

Critical Factors

- Providing a safety valve for the counselors

Starr acknowledges that sometimes it’s virtually impossible not to become judgmental. Richmond SPCA counselors are trained to remember that becoming judgmental never helps the animal. If they feel themselves becoming emotional, they are trained to excuse themselves and either take a moment to regroup or find someone else to help the client.

- Making expectations clear and expecting a very high standard of performance

According to Starr, it is critical to make staff members understand the importance of their role. The organization prepares admissions staff with the skills and resources they need to be comfortable counseling people and then holds them to a very high standard. “Anything less would compromise the counseling effort and cause the public to see us in a negative light.”

How They Feel About What They Did

According to Starr, Surrender Counseling is the most important piece of the entire Project Safety Net Program.

Some Words of Wisdom

Be Prepared For

Change takes time and not all staff members will be able to make the transition. At the Richmond SPCA, even after six months of training, some staff members left and others had to be reassigned.

You’ll need to engage in refresher training. It’s easy for staff members to slip back into old approaches to the public or to slide back into making poor admissions decisions. Training with role playing every six months or so will keep the program effective.

Next Steps

According to Starr, the Richmond SPCA is always on the lookout for better ways to communicate with the public and educate them about animal welfare issues.

Richmond SPCA: Thumbnail Sketch

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Robin Starr: CEO
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The Richmond SPCA provides training and consultation as a partner in ASPCA® Mission: Orange™, a national initiative to train and support other cities across the country interested in becoming humane communities.

Stats

From Oct. 1, 2005 to Sept. 30, 2006, the Richmond SPCA:

- Saved the lives of 4,325 animals through adoption, re-homing and behavioral assistance programs.
- Rehabilitated approximately 2,300 sick and injured pets
- Achieved a citywide save rate of 76%, giving Richmond one of the lowest euthanasia rates in the country
- Spayed or neutered 11,017 animals in their on-site clinic
- Delivered 8,512 hours of humane education to area school children and 3,060 hours of adult education

Staff

43 full time. 43 part time

175 active volunteers

Operating Budget

\$3.3million

Business Type

501(c) (3) nonprofit



RE-HOMING PACKET



Dear Pet Guardian:

Enclosed is a packet of information to help you re-home your pet(s). You should find the following:

PROJECT SAFETY NET INFORMATION

Providing alternatives to surrendering your pet to a shelter is the goal of Project Safety Net. These include re-homing your pet from your home and obtaining behavior assistance from our trained staff, among other alternatives. If after exhausting these options you still need to find another home for your pet, this packet contains information to help you.

RE-HOMING SERVICE INFORMATION AND POSTER

A component of Project Safety Net, the Re-Homing Service, offers tools for you to find a responsible and loving family for your pet without causing him or her the stress of entering the shelter system. The service is designed to help people whose pets are already spayed or neutered. Having your pet neutered makes it easier to find him or her a new home and improves his or her chance of forming a lasting and successful relationship with the new owner.

RICHMOND SPCA PERFECT MATCH FORM AND ADOPTER INFORMATION

Our "Perfect Match" and Adoption Application forms are included to show you how to evaluate potential adopters and give you guidance on the types of things to look for when finding your pet a new home on your own.

ADMISSIONS INFORMATION

Once you have exhausted all the resources available through Project Safety Net, you can call to make an appointment to surrender your pet. The procedures for appointments and the waiting list are explained later in this document on the Admissions Information page.

Sincerely,

Richmond SPCA Admissions Team



PROJECT SAFETY NET



Project Safety Net seeks to provide alternatives to pet relinquishment. The Richmond SPCA and other shelters in the area take in anywhere from 20-100 animals a day during our busy months. If you plan to turn your own animal in at a shelter, please reconsider.

The Richmond SPCA has the following resources available to assist you with keeping your family pet.

RE-HOMING

Ask around to see if you know anyone (friends, family, co-workers, etc.) who is looking for a new pet, or take advantage of free resources such as the Re-Homing section of our Web site. It is better for your pet if you are able to re-home him or her yourself. The shelter can be a very stressful environment.

PET BEHAVIOR HELP

For help with behavior issues and concerns, call **643-SPCA (7722)** or email behaviorhelpline@richmondspca.org. Trained staff will contact you by the next business day. You may also want to visit www.richmondspca.org/behavior for a list of helpful behavior resources and information.

PET MANNERS CLASSES

Ask how to sign up for a class specifically designed to help great pets that have minor challenges. Visit www.richmondspca.org/classes for a listing of the classes offered by our department of education and training.

PET-FRIENDLY HOUSING GUIDE

Visit our web site at www.richmondspca.org/petfriendly for a list of apartments that permit pets. If it is a behavior problem that is keeping you from taking your pet, such as housebreaking, please call our behavior helpline at **643-SPCA (7722)** and we can assist you.

LOW-COST, FULL-SERVE VETERINARY CARE

The Richmond SPCA's Clinic for Compassionate Care provides full-service veterinary care at a low cost to pets of income-qualified families. For information about becoming a client, please visit us online at www.richmondspca.org/clinic.

FOSTER CARE

If you are surrendering a sick animal or a mom and her litter, are you willing to keep the pet until he or she is well or the litter until its old enough to be spayed or neutered? Join our Surrender & Foster program. We provide all the food, medications and vaccinations, and when they are ready to be spayed or neutered in our Clinic for Compassionate Care and then adopted into a loving new home.

TRAP-NEUTER-RETURN FOR FERAL CATS

If you have feral (unsocialized) cats in your neighborhood, visit us online at www.richmondspca.org/feralcats for information about trap-neuter-return. The Richmond SPCA can also assist you with trap rentals and free spay/neuter and rabies vaccination services for feral cats. Call **521-1310** for our Feral Cat Helpline.

The Richmond SPCA accepts pets from their owner by appointment only. For additional information or to schedule an appointment, please call 521-1306. Trained staff will contact you within two business days.



RICHMOND SPCA RE-HOMING SERVICE



Consider finding your dog or cat another home instead of surrendering him to a shelter because it will be less stressful for your animal, allows you to play a part in uniting him with a new family, and makes additional space available for pets whose lives are immediately at risk in surrounding government shelters.

BEFORE YOU START LOOKING FOR A NEW HOME FOR YOUR PET, CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING:

Get help with behavior problems such as chewing, housebreaking challenges, excessive energy, etc. Go to www.richmondspca.org/classes, www.richmondspca.org/behavior or call **643-SPCA (7722)** and our trained staff will give you the information or referrals you need to resolve the issue. By working to solve behavior problems before you find your pet a new home, you'll help ensure a good, lasting home for your pet.

You do not have to give up your pet just because you're moving. Moving is stressful even in the best of circumstances, so give yourself extra time to find a residence where pets are permitted. When talking to landlords, be honest and offer to introduce your pet(s) to the landlord. Many property owners will allow well-behaved pets, particularly if the owner behaves responsibly. Providing your pet's veterinary records, graduation certificate(s) from obedience classes, and references from past landlords can help to show a prospective landlord you are a responsible pet owner. For a list of many (but not all) landlords and apartment complexes that allow pets, please visit www.richmondspca.org/petfriendly for the Pet-Friendly Housing Guide. Once you have a new place, the Richmond SPCA can give you advice on how to help you and your pet cope with the change.

THE RICHMOND SPCA CAN HELP YOU FIND THE RIGHT HOME THROUGH OUR RE-HOMING SERVICE

First, be sure your pet is spayed or neutered and is up-to-date on all of his or her vaccinations. This will make it easier for you to find a new home for your pet and is a requirement for our posting.

Next, follow these guidelines. Be thorough and patient - finding the right home takes time, but it's worth it for your sake and the sake of your pet.

- **Take several color photos of your pet.** Show off your pet's cutest and most endearing qualities.
- **Write a story about your pet.** Include the reason your pet needs a new home, the kind of home he or she needs and would do well in, and some "human interest" information - for example, your pet's funniest behaviors, his/her favorite things to do, or the thing you love most about your pet. Many people write the story from the animal's perspective, for example, "Hi, my name is Sabrina..."
- **Re-home your pet on our web site.** Submit a photograph and a brief story of your pet to rehome@richmondspca.org. Interested persons will contact you to learn more about the animal. Pets will remain on the web site for at least 90 days. You will be responsible for contacting 521-1314 once your pet has been adopted. All pets must be spayed or neutered to be posted on the web site.
- **E-mail out to friends, family or co-workers.** Give your photos, story and e-mail to everyone you know asking for their help. Advertise through your workplace e-mail or your community bulletin board. Placing your pet with someone you know will ease the transition for you, the new owner and your pet.
- **Make a re-homing poster.** Use the Richmond SPCA re-homing template included in this packet as a guideline. Make several photocopies of the poster and then attach an original photo to each poster. Place the re-homing posters in veterinary offices and pet supply stores near and far, where people who take good care of their animals visit often.

- **Charge a fee.** Most people who want a pet for the right reasons are happy to pay a modest adoption fee.
- **Advertise.** Place an ad in your local newspaper, listing the most important characteristics about your pet and the kind of home your pet needs. This will cost a little more, but will save you time and aggravation evaluating applicants. Advertisements with photos get more attention.

HELPFUL HINTS ON EVALUATING POTENTIAL ADOPTERS:

- **Interview potential adopters carefully.** Use the adoption application we have provided as a guide.
- **Review the "Perfect Match" form.** Go over this document with each applicant to see if the applicant's lifestyle is compatible with your pet. Does your pet fight with cats? Is your pet high or low energy? Make sure he/she fits into the lifestyle of the applicant's family, and your pet is what they're really looking for.
- **Along with the adoption application, you might consider the following in order to ascertain additional information (please note that with respect to some of these items, an open and honest discussion will provide you with the information you need to make an informed decision regarding your pet's placement):**
 1. Verify the name and address with a driver's license.
 2. Call the person's landlord and make sure he/she has permission to have a pet.
 3. Ask to see the person's veterinary records on all his/her current or past pets to see if he/she takes good care of animals.
 4. Get references (friends, neighbors), and call to see if they can vouch for the person's ability to care for animals.
- **Take the time to consider applicants.** Don't allow yourself to be pressured into making a decision that you do not feel right about. Your judgment is your best guide.
- **Follow up.** Call to see how your pet is doing in his/her new home. A responsible owner will welcome your concern for the animal.

I Am Looking for a New Family

My Name Is: _____

PLACE PET PHOTO HERE.
FILL IN STORY, AND POST AROUND YOUR COMMUNITY.

UP TO A 4" X 6" PHOTO

I am a _____
Age, Sex and Breed Mix/Type

Here is my story:

If you would like to meet me, please contact _____
Owner's name

Days _____

Evenings _____

Last updated: _____

THE PERFECT MATCH FOR DOGS

Suggested questions

Preferences

What drew you to this particular dog? _____

What are your reasons for adopting a dog:

- Watchdog Breeding Hunting dog Child's pet
 Guard dog for business Companion for other pet
 Companion for self or family Guard dog for home
 Gift Notes: _____

How many hours a day will the dog be kept outside? _____
Notes: _____

Where will the dog sleep? _____

When outside, how do you intend to keep your dog confined to your property? fenced pen leash fenced yard
 Chain/tie out other _____

Do you have or are you planning for: m fenced yard
 a run a stationary tie-out Dog house Crate

About the Household

How many adults _____ and children _____ are in your home?

Ages of children _____

How many _____ dog(s) _____ indoor cat(s),
_____ indoor/out door cats, and other pets/animals? _____

How many dogs _____ and/or cats _____ have you had as an adult?

How long did you have these pets and where are they now?

Finish this sentence: I need a dog that will tolerate being alone
_____ hours a day.

How will you exercise the dog?

- Backyard Walk/jog Daily Dog Park
 Other _____

Dog Behavior

What difficult dog behaviors have you dealt with before? _____

What doggie habits would you like more information on?

- Chewing Barking Digging Play biting
 Housebreaking Rough Play
Other _____

Other Possible Questions

Have you ever owned this breed before?

Have you ever owned a puppy before?

How do you feel about Crate Training?

How busy is your household?

When it comes to relating to dogs, do you tend to be more...

- Consistent, a real leader. (the dog must sit for a cookie)
 Lenient, a little wishy-washy, easily coerced by the dog.

Notes:

THE PERFECT MATCH FOR CATS

Suggested questions

About the Household

How many adults _____ and children _____ are in your home?

Ages of children _____

What pets do you have in your household? dog(s) _____ indoor cats(s) _____, indoor/outdoor cats _____, and these other pets/animals. _____

How many dogs _____ and/or _____ cats have you had as an adult?

Where are they now? _____

How long did you have them? _____

If you have a dog: what experience has the dog had with cats?

This cat will....

- will live strictly indoors
- will be living indoors/outdoors
- will live outdoors only
- will enjoy being outside while I'm with him/her
- will come and go independently
- will enjoy living in our barn

Cat Behavior

What kitty habits would you like more information on?

- Litter box problems
- Scratching furniture
- Play biting
- Other _____

Other Possible Questions

Have you ever had a cat with litter box problems? _____

If yes how did you resolve the problem? _____

Have you ever owned a kitten before? _____

How much time do you think it will take for the cat to adjust to his/her new environment? _____

What is it about this cat that drew you to him/her?

Notes:

ADOPTER INFORMATION

Name _____

Date _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip Code _____

Home Phone _____

Employer _____

Occupation _____

Work Phone _____

Spouse's Employer _____

Spouse's Work Phone _____

E-mail Address _____

My current living arrangement is:

- I own my own home.
- I live with my parents. Do they know you are getting a pet? Yes ___ No ___
- I rent. Describe your landlord's pet policy: _____

Veterinarian's name _____

Phone number _____

How much annually are you planning on spending on your pet for vet care? _____

Name of emergency/alternate contact _____ Relation _____

Phone _____

- I certify the above information to be true and correct.
- I understand that the Richmond SPCA provides free behavior support, which pet guardians can access online at www.richmondspca.org/behavior or by calling (804) 643-SPCA.

Signature _____

Date _____



WHAT TO DO IF YOU NEED TO SURRENDER YOUR PET?

You have a number of choices, the last of which should be surrendering your pet to a shelter. If you have exhausted alternatives to relinquishment (including trying to work through challenges, or trying to find a new home for you pet yourself with friends, neighbors, family or co-workers), here is how our admissions process works.

WHAT YOU SHOULD EXPECT

Please understand that, as a no-kill humane society, the Richmond SPCA cannot accept every animal brought to our shelter immediately. We treat every animal's life as precious and will not resort to euthanasia to control the number of pets at our Robins-Starr Humane Center. Therefore, we will accept the surrender of owned cats and dogs by appointment only as space allows. We do charge a modest surrender fee for dogs and cats, which will be applied to the costs we will incur providing care to the pet.

HOW THE PROCESS WORKS

Each day Richmond SPCA Admissions staff assess the amount of space available in the shelter as animals find homes through the Adoption center. Based on the number of adoptions and available cages and kennels, a staff member will call you based upon your order on our waiting list, to schedule appointments for the week. Appointments are scheduled Monday through Friday from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Each appointment should take approximately 1 to 1.5 hours.

If an Admissions Team member leaves a message, we must hear back from you within 48 hours to confirm that you still need our services. Leaving a voicemail is considered confirmation. If we are unable to contact you or you do not return our message within 48 hours of our initial call, we will leave your name on the waiting list, but will contact the next person to bring in his pet for the available space. The goal of this process is to have available spaces filled as quickly as possible, keeping cages from standing empty and maximizing our lifesaving capacity.

WHAT TO BRING WITH YOU

- All veterinary records
- Your pet's medications
- Special food or treats that your pet needs
- Your pet's bed, toys, leash and other belongings from home
- Your pet's crate or carrier
- If you received the surrender forms in the mail, or you downloaded them, or we faxed them to you, feel free to complete those beforehand to speed up the appointment process.

For everyone's safety, all dogs must be leashed and all cats must be in a carrier.

WHAT TO DO WHEN YOU ARRIVE

- Your cat will be tested for feline AIDS and leukemia, or your dog over 6 months of age will be tested for heartworms.
- A staff member will evaluate the behavior of your pet.
- Once your pet has been evaluated, and the Richmond SPCA decides to take your pet into its care, your surrender fee will be collected. The surrender fee is usually \$50 (exceptions may apply for litters of infant animals). Accepted forms of payment are cash or credit/debit card.

- An appointment for evaluation does not guarantee that the Richmond SPCA will be in a position to take your pet into its care.

WHAT TO DO IF YOU NEED TO SURRENDER YOUR PET TODAY

The Richmond SPCA urges you not to surrender your pet to a shelter. A shelter should always be your very last resort. If you are unwilling to wait for an appointment at our center, you may contact the local animal control agency in your jurisdiction to inquire about their surrender process. You may also want to ask questions related to their adoption and euthanasia practices for owned animals.

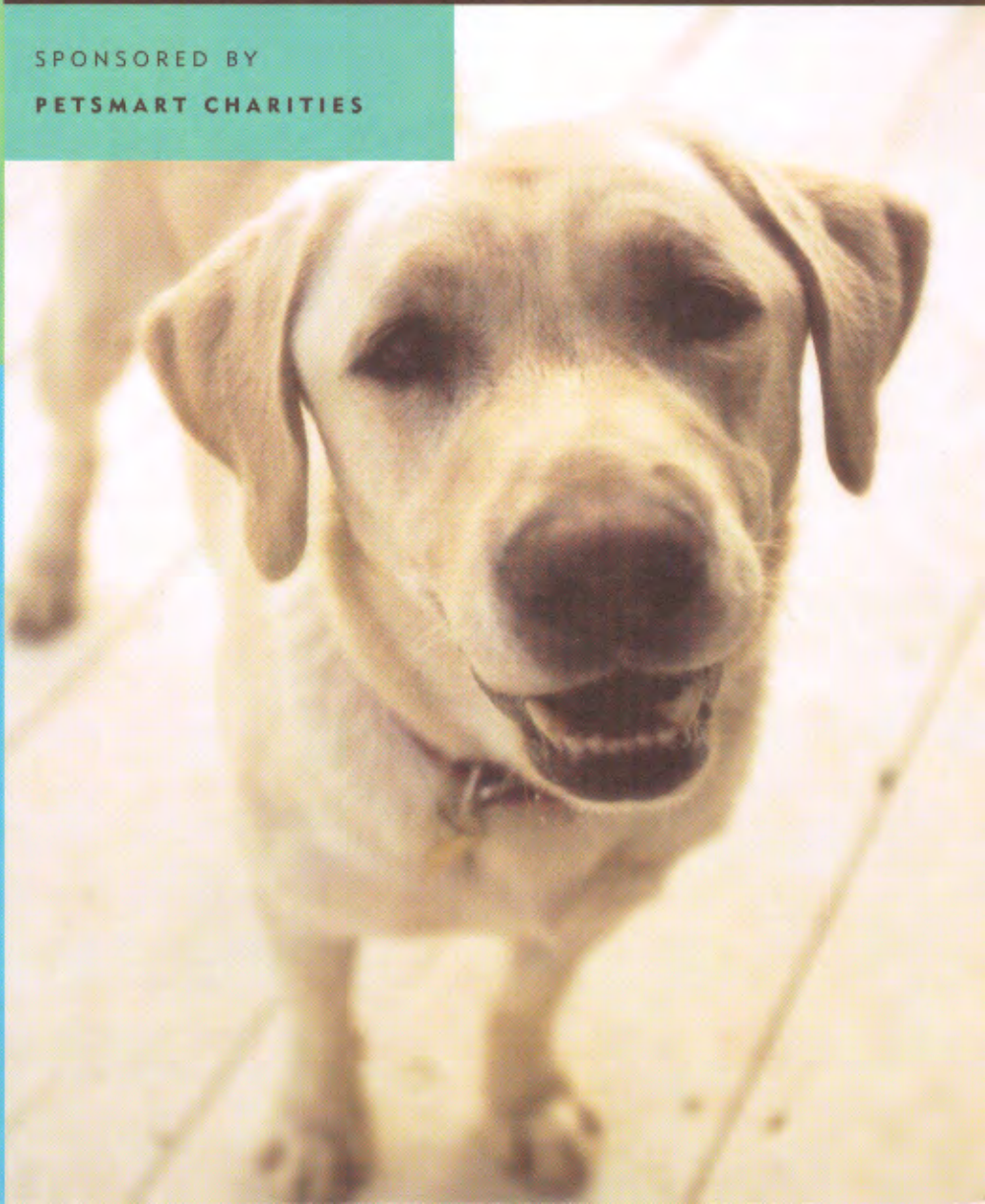
CONTACT INFORMATION

Richmond SPCA Admissions Department:	521-1306
Chesterfield County Animal Control:	748-1683
Henrico County Animal Control:	727-8800
Hanover County Animal Control:	365-6485
Richmond City Animal Care and Control:	646-5573

REPORT ON ADOPTION FORUM II

PHOENIX ARIZONA
JANUARY 16-17, 2003

SPONSORED BY
PETSMART CHARITIES



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A LIFELONG, LOVING HOME FOR EVERY PET

PETSMART CHARITIES MISSION:

TO IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF LIFE FOR ALL COMPANION ANIMALS, PETSMART CHARITIES CREATES AND SUPPORTS PROGRAMS THAT SAVE THE LIVES OF HOMELESS PETS AND PROMOTE HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN PEOPLE AND PETS.

ADOPTION FORUM II

When an animal comes in to our care, we feel responsible for making sure he or she has a better life in the future than in the past. We hope that future will be in a new home. More than that, we want it to be a good home; a committed and loving home. How to achieve that, and how to know when we have achieved that, was the topic of Adoption Forum II, held in Phoenix, Arizona in January of 2003.

In 1999, PETsMART Charities sponsored the first Adoption Forum, held by the American Humane Association, to address and reassess typical adoption criteria used by adopting agencies. The widely-distributed report on that meeting has led many agencies to reconsider their adoption processes to make them more open, and give more animals and families a chance. Rather than looking for the perfect home, we are looking for at least an average home.

At Adoption Forum II we looked beyond adoption criteria to consider these questions:

- What is a successful adoption?
- What is the best adoption process?
- What are the characteristics of an adoption follow-up program that offers support and improves the chance of a successful bond developing?
- How can we best measure the outcomes of adoption programs?
- What is the effect of a good adoption program on the agency and the community?

Participants were chosen to represent non-profit shelters, adoption groups with foster networks, animal control agencies, and national animal welfare organizations. We looked for wide geographic representation. Many of the participants have worked at multiple animal interest organizations, and have been in the field for many years. They are all well-networked with other animal care groups in their communities, states and regions. A list of the participants is provided at the end of this report.

An agency's adoption program is often its most visible interaction with the community. In fact, to the public, adoptions are who we are – the shelter is a place where you can go get animals. No matter what other programs an agency has, rehoming animals successfully is most likely to win the public's approval – not to mention being crucial for the animals in our care.

But there are many different opinions on the best approach to making successful matches between potential adopters and the animals. Different agencies, each trying to do the very best for the animals in their care, arrive at different conclusions on how to do this. In this meeting, we sought consensus, and didn't always get it. When opinions differed, the range of opinions are explained in the text.

WHAT IS A SUCCESSFUL ADOPTION?

Before discussing how to achieve successful adoptions, or have a successful adoption program, it was important to determine what we would call a “success” in this context.

The question was: How would we describe the outcomes of a successful adoption, considering the following areas:

- Quality of care and surroundings
- Minimum length of stay in the home/relationship
- General post-adoption behavior of the adopter
- Returns and alternative dispositions

In considering the quality of care and surrounding that would characterize a successful adoption, the group referred to the “Five Freedoms”, first developed by those advocating for humane care for farm animals:

The concept of the 5 Freedoms was revised somewhat to fit the basic needs of companion animals: These we’ll call the Five Essentials of a Successful Adoption:

1. The match would be suited to the individual animal and family
2. The pet would be afforded appropriate veterinary care
3. The pet’s social, behavioral, and companionship needs would be met
4. The pet would have a livable environment (including appropriate food, water, shelter, etc)
5. The pet would be respected and valued

While everyone had a vision of what the “best” life would be for a pet, we don’t have any data on what the average pet’s life is really like. There was agreement that in adoptions, we should set achievable goals. There may be only a small percentage of “best” homes, but there will be many, many “acceptable” homes. If the 5 basic criteria above are met, the home could be considered acceptable.

It’s conventional wisdom by now that we can’t stop anyone from getting a pet—if we turn them down, they can always go elsewhere. But at least our animals will be sterilized before they go into a home. And the fact that a person has chosen to come to the shelter to adopt probably means they are trying to do the right thing.

5 FREEDOMS FOR FARM ANIMALS

1. Freedom from fear and distress
2. Freedom from hunger and thirst
3. Freedom from discomfort
4. Freedom from pain, injury and disease
5. Freedom to express normal behavior

THE IMPORTANCE OF ADOPTIONS AND RISK TAKING

In open-admission shelters that euthanize, an adoption that is turned down may mean the pet ends up dying. But even at agencies that don't euthanize, a declined adoption application means the pet spends more time in a cage - and reduces the number of new pets that can be rescued by the agency while he or she waits for the "perfect" home. Against these serious, perhaps disastrous outcomes, it makes sense to take some risks - especially if we can institute programs after the adoption to reduce that risk.

The group agreed that the length of stay in an adoptive home is not, in itself, a measure of success. The optimal situation is a lifelong home, but less than that is not a failure. More important is the adopter's intent and effort to build a permanent bond with the animal.

There are many reasons why an adopted animal might be returned to an adopting agency. Since most adopting agencies require by contract that animals be brought back to them if the adoptions don't work out, the adopters are only following instructions by returning an animal. Doing what we ask is a positive, not a negative.

On the plus side of a return is the opportunity to learn more about how the pet behaved in a home environment, information that may help a great deal in making a future placement.

POST-ADOPTION BEHAVIOR OF THE ADOPTER

When the group discussed the hoped-for post-adoption behavior of the adopter, our expectations were quite high. We recognized that this puts a great deal of responsibility on the adopting agency to provide support and partner with the adopter to achieve these behaviors. If we have done our job well:

- The adopter utilizes appropriate resources for problem solving
- The adopter feels satisfaction with the animal chosen
- The adopter continues to learn more about their pet and the care she needs
- The adopter maximizes use of resources to build a satisfactory relationship with and fulfill the needs of the pet
- The adopter feels they "aren't in it alone", and can comfortably call the adopting agency for help without fear of being judged stupid or cruel.
- The adopter understands that acceptable reasons why an adoption doesn't work do occur, and feels comfortable returning the pet to the shelter without fear of recrimination

ACCEPTING RETURNS

There was a clear feeling on the part of the group that the human/animal bond shouldn't be forced. Many problems can be resolved with resources such as training classes, pet sitters, veterinary attention, etc. We hope all of these will be tried, and that severing the relationship will be a last resort. (In fact, a study by Natalie DeGiacomo found that most adopters do think long and hard, and try several solutions, before finally giving up on a pet.)

But if the relationship is not working, the important issue is how to provide the pet with a positive future, apparently not available in her current home.

For the adopter, even an experience that doesn't work out may help a great deal in understanding what an animal needs, normal or unusual pet behaviors, and what is required to bring a pet into the family. This adopter's next pet choice may be more fitting for his/her situation, or perhaps the adopter will decide to wait until home conditions have changed before making a future adoption. And because the adopter has been treated well by the adopting agency, he/she will probably return there when the time is right.

Optimally, the adopter will want to be actively involved in placing the animal in a new home, and the adopting agency will support that. One way for the first adopter to help is by supplying detailed information about the pet's likes and dislikes, reactions to others - human or animal, preferences for food and toys, and behavior plusses and minuses. This information could vastly improve your chance of identifying the right home for the pet on the second try - especially when she was an animal about whom you had little knowledge when she first came in. The animal was likely sterilized before she went to the first home, and if the adopter has taken the pet to a veterinarian, she may have gotten all the basic care and vaccinations she needs. Again, this may make the pet more appealing to a future adopter.

NOT AN EASY DECISION

While we tend to view relinquishment as a thoughtless expression of a throw-away society, one study showed that the process begins long before the animal is taken to a shelter, and is anything but thoughtless. Relinquishers interviewed struggled with the decision to give up their pets for a prolonged time. The struggle often manifested as procrastination, as attachment issues, and negative perceptions of shelters balanced against circumstances threatening the pets' position with the family. Attempts at solutions were unsuccessful - although it is likely that resources and support that would truly help were either not available, not known of by the pet guardian, or considered to be beyond the financial means or general capability of the guardian.

From "Surrendering Pets to Shelters: The Relinquisher's Perspective", *Anthrozoos*, Natalie DiGiacomo et al, Vol. 11 No. 1, 1998

THE ILLUSION OF CONTROL

This was a theme that ran throughout the meeting. Because we care so deeply about the animals we shelter, we want to be able to assure them a loving future. Adoption is seen as a flood-gate we tightly control to guarantee the animal's "next life" is a good one.

The truth is we simply cannot control the outcome of any adoption — except to make sure the pet is sterilized and microchipped before being placed.

We think by having strict requirements and many barriers to overcome in order to qualify for adoption, that we have instituted good controls. Too often the effect is to turn adopters into liars, and us into the adoption police.

Our potential adopters, who at best might become our partners in the community to help protect animals, instead become angry and feel ill-treated and distrusted.

The agency gets a negative image in the community, which will discourage people from coming to us for animals. The end result is that more of our animals will end up euthanized, while people who want animals will get them from commercial sources or the next-door neighbor.

When we give up the illusion of control and focus instead on providing education, support and resources before and after a new pet enters the home, we put ourselves in a positive light as a community service that welcomes citizens.

ALTERNATIVE DISPOSITIONS: PASS THROUGH ADOPTIONS AND PRIVATE PLACEMENT

Whether we like it or not, there will be many cases where the adopters themselves will place the animal in another home. The group felt we must accept the reality of this, and consider that it could work out very well for the pet.

By mandating to the adopter that their only alternatives are to keep the animal themselves or bring him back to the shelter, we take ourselves out of the loop should the person choose to do otherwise.

Some people may come to us intending from the first to adopt an animal for another person, but choose not to reveal that fact during the adoption counseling session for fear they will be turned down. Adult children may see it as part of their caretaker role to find a small dog or cat for an elderly parent — and whether this works out well or not, the shelter may never know.

On the other hand, people who adopt pets for themselves, then find she isn't working out, may indeed have a friend or relative who wants the pet and can provide a wonderful home. But they aren't likely to let the shelter know if they think the shelter will demand the animal be snatched out of her new, happy home and returned to a cage.

Is an adopter really doing wrong by trying to assure the pet's happy future themselves, rather than putting the problem back into the adopting agency's hands? Isn't that the type of behavior we would like to see in pet guardians?

Certainly the outcome may be disastrous, but if we force responsible guardians to hide secondary placements from us, we won't know the outcome — good or bad!

The more you try to control the outcome in this case, the more you are apt to lose control.

One suggestion for dealing with the realities of alternative disposition and pass-through adoptions is to let the adopter know that, while it is preferred that the animal be returned to the shelter, if they choose to do the rehoming themselves the agency requests that the adopter supply the name and address of the new guardian so the shelter can send them information on pet care and the services they offer. In this way, there is the possibility of making positive contact with the person who winds up with the animal to help make that relationship successful for pet and guardian.

THE ADOPTION PROCESS

The group agreed that a good adoption process:

- Takes place in a pleasant and welcoming atmosphere
- Is respectful of the adopter's experience and knowledge and assume both of you come from a place of commonality wanting to help animals
- Takes a conversational approach with open-ended questions such as "what are you looking for," "what's your lifestyle," etc.
- Is a discussion, rather than a series of barriers the applicant must overcome in order to get an animal
- Focuses on success, and creating a relationship with the client
- Looks for a way to make an adaption, not turn one down
- Treats each applicant and animal as individuals
- Uses guidelines to delineate issues for discussion and education, not as inflexible mandates
- Emphasizes the resources the shelter can provide to help solve any problems that arise
- Is ready to re-direct the adopter to other options as needed
- Emphasizes that post-adoption contact from the adopter will be welcomed

FOCUS ON SUCCESS

Too often we approach our adoption checklist as a test. Give the right answer and you will get the animal. Get even one answer wrong, and you fail the test. We are focused on identifying problems until we find one that eliminates the adopter, then we move onto the next applicant. Meanwhile we lament that so few animals in our community are adopted from shelters!

The group suggests being success-focused instead. Focus first on the joy of adding a pet to the home and then get into discussion of possible "challenges" the animal presents. Too much focus on the down side may lead to discouragement on the part of the adopter to work with the animal to ameliorate problems. Encouragement and information may turn a doubtful situation into a successful one.

I think it is an unrealistic expectation to think that the shelter failed when the adoption didn't work out. Don't beat yourself up; animals and people behave differently at home than in our shelter.

RISK IS JUST RISK

Recent studies have indicated some of the risk factors that increase the chance that a guardian will relinquish an animal – age, lack of obedience training, tendency to house soil, being noisy, and others. But “increased chance” doesn’t mean any adoption involving such animal problems will fail – it just means there are identifiable issues to be dealt with. Look at risk factors as being incomplete data and don’t use these assumptions as hard fact in determining which animals are made available for adoption or who gets an animal.

By dealing with the issues with the adopter and the pet, you can decrease the risk factor. It’s Risk Management in the animal’s favor.

ADOPTION CRITERIA AND GUIDELINES

The group felt that the primary and guiding values in evaluating a potential placement should be the 5 Essentials:

- The match would be suited to the individual animal and family.
- The pet would be afforded appropriate veterinary care.
- The pet’s social, behavioral and companionship needs would be met.
- The pet would have a livable environment (including appropriate food, water, shelter, exercise, etc).
- The pet would be respected and valued.

However, there were some basic hard criteria that all agreed must be met before an adoption could be approved.

1. The animal must be spayed or neutered. Optimally this will be done before the animal is given to the adopter, but at least the adopter must sign a contract agreeing to have the surgery performed
2. No animal will be adopted to an applicant with a known history of animal or child abuse
3. No animal will be adopted to an individual who is suspected of being drunk or high at the time of application
4. No animal will be adopted to be used as a food source

A final criteria was judged by the group to be almost at the level of the first four:

5. The adopter must agree to keep identification on the animal at all times. Many in the group felt they would not actually turn down an adoption to someone who did not agree, but felt the importance of identification should be highly emphasized because so many animals who end up in shelters are there because they are lost animals whose guardians cannot be identified. Providing a collar and tags and microchip at the time of adoption can support this effort.

ISSUES OF CONCERN

The group identified several issues of concern – issues that can negatively affect the ability of the adopter to provide the 5 Essentials. All of these issues should be discussed with the potential adopter to determine whether he/she will be able to provide for the needs of the animals.

CHAINING

The group was opposed to the idea of chaining dogs outside all the time, but felt this could be most effectively dealt with by explaining the problems that arise in this situation, and discussing alternatives. For instance, the group noted that a cable run is different from being kept on a short chain, and may allow the pet to exercise more freely than she otherwise could. If housetraining is the issue, then learning how to use a crate might be the answer. Help the adopter come up with a plan that meets his needs and the needs of the pet.

GUARD DOG/MOUSER

Companionship should be the primary reason for choosing to adopt a pet, but not necessarily the only reason. Again, the underlying question is, “how will the 5 Essentials be met?” You also should determine whether you and the potential adopter are speaking the same language. For instance, by “guard dog” you may be thinking of an underfed, neglected dog guarding a salvage yard. The adopter may mean a dog who barks when anyone comes to the door. And “mousing” could be more a hoped-for behavior from the family cat than the primary reason for seeking a new pet.

ADOPTION COUNSELOR’S INTUITIVE JUDGMENT

While a counselor’s intuitive judgment of a potential adopter should be given weight, it must not be allowed to sink into the realm of prejudice. Automatically rejecting a certain type or group of people from consideration as adopters just artificially reduces the number of homes available to animals without taking the time to even evaluate the individual’s worth. We must be conscious of our personal bias and filters.

OUTSIDE DOG

The question is not simply whether or not the dog will live solely or primarily outside, but rather how the dog’s social and companionship needs will be met. Mitigating factors may be the presence of other animals (dog, horse, goat, etc) the dog can play with, and how much time the dog will spend with his guardian (i.e., how much time does the guardian spend outdoors). Also, we might consider that many a dog meant to sleep outside has wagged and wiggled his way indoors – often right into the guardian’s bed.

OUTSIDE CAT OR INSIDE/OUTSIDE CAT

This was considered to be a good example of a requirement that leads applicants to lie to the agency. Ultimately, the adopting agency cannot control this situation. A reasonable expectation may be that the adopter understands all the dangers of letting a cat outside, the importance of always having ID on the pet, and the shelter's strong preference that cats be kept indoors. Give information on ways to enrich the indoor environment to improve quality of life without "outdoor time." But the bottom line may be that if the adopter wants a cat for a pet, and plans to let her outside, at least a shelter cat will be spayed or neutered so unwanted reproduction will not occur. The same may not be true of a cat from another source.

LANDLORD PERMISSION

Adopters need to understand if they have a pet in a no-pet rental, they may be forced to find new housing in order to keep the pet. Rather than acting as a detective in this case, you can choose to trust the adopter to make a good decision.

PET GUARDIAN HISTORY

While past failed human/pet relationships raise red flags, the group felt strongly that the simple fact of problems with previous pets should not deter future adoptions. The real value of finding out the guardian's history is in seeing areas where resources will be needed to help make sure past problems do not recur. If an applicant has no history of pet ownership, a discussion on expectations may help start the relationship off well. In addition, more follow-up and support may be needed after the adoption.

ARE OTHER ANIMALS IN THE HOME SPAYED OR NEUTERED?

At some agencies, this requirement is meant to incentivize the adopter to get his/her other pets sterilized. However, viewed strictly in terms of the welfare of the animal being adopted, the only important thing is to make sure the pet you are adopting out is sterilized before going into a new home. Chances are, when the adopter finds out how pleasant it is to live with a neutered pet, the incentive to neuter their other pets will be there in spades.

DECLAWING

This was the most controversial issue discussed. While no one in the group liked the idea of declawing, there were different opinions on whether the intent to declaw would always mean turning down an adoption.

For some, interfering with the integrity of the pet's body for our own convenience was simply ethically wrong and never acceptable in an adoption.

On the other hand, we do accept altering an animal's body when we see it as being for the pet's benefit (ear tipping) and/or the benefit of the species (spay/neuter). Right or wrong, we also cite the "convenience benefits" of spay/neuter (less yowling, roaming, spraying, etc.) as an inducement to get guardians to sterilize their pets. Yet, declawing is a very different surgery from spay/neuter, with more complications likely, and some felt the two could not be compared.

An important issue is the amount of pain experienced in declawing surgery and its aftermath. It appears beyond question that post-operative pain is most often present. New emphasis among veterinarians on pain management and the use of post-operative analgesia could relieve pain for the cats. Improved surgical techniques, including laser surgery, may make the procedure easier on the cats and reduce any long-term deficits. But even if the pain were eliminated, the ethical question still remains.

Negative behavioral effects such as increased biting, increased house soiling, and lack of a primary means of defense are also frequently cited as strong reasons to eliminate declawing. A review of research on behavioral effects of declawing done by Dr. Gary Patronek of Tufts University reveals no conclusive evidence one way or the other about behavioral effects. Most studies involved only small numbers of cats or were unable to account for other variables that might be in play. Dr. Patronek concludes his article with a call for better studies with more definitive data on which to base our conclusions on declawing.

This is not a small issue. Despite the years of animal welfare advocacy against declawing, a survey by the National Council on Pet Population Study and Policy found that more than 24% of owned cats have been declawed. We must think long and hard about eliminating up to a quarter of potential cat homes as prospects for adoption.

If refusing an adoption because an applicant wants to declaw means the cat is likely to be euthanized, the stakes become very high. More animal professionals are willing to accept declawing as a last resort to being relinquished or euthanized, and would accept it as an option if death were the only likely alternative.

Whatever stand your agency takes on this issue, it is clearly one where education is key – especially because it is easy for adopters to give the “right” answer – no – to the declawing question while intending to go ahead with it once they have the cat home. The potential adopter needs to know the possible drawbacks to declawing, and be provided with tools and techniques to train for appropriate clawing before a problem occurs.

SELLING AN ETHIC

Every conversation with a potential adopter is an opportunity to advocate for the interests and well being of the animals. That is really the greater objective of a humane organization. It is why we don't just sell an animal to anyone who walks through the door. Instead we counsel adopters, making education part of the package along with the dog or cat. Our job is to impact humans and animals in a positive way. We are not just adopting out animals, we are selling an ethic of humane action and respect for life.

BUSINESS PRACTICES

The group considered issues such as adoption fee levels and differentials, requiring positive identification from adopters, type of database used to maintain and evaluate data, contracts, follow-up for fundraising and the like to be business practices, and not covered in this symposium.

ADOPTION FOLLOW-UP PROGRAM

Since a good adoption follow-up program is key to the long-term success of adoptions, it is important that the organization is committed to it from top to bottom. In a good follow-up program:

- The organization has a clear structure and explicit objectives for the follow-up program
- The board and administration allocates the staff or volunteers and resources necessary to carry out the program. This may mean prioritizing use of resources to follow-up over other attractive but more peripheral programs
- There is cultural acknowledgement by adoption personnel that follow-up is essential, not just a "good idea"
- Outcomes are tracked and used to evaluate and improve the program.

THE ROLE OF RISK ASSESSMENT

The group preferred that a follow-up program be applied to every adoption, but realized you may not have the resources to do that. If that is the case, the next best thing might be to develop a process of risk assessment to identify adoptions that experience and available data suggest might be at highest risk for failure, and those that present relatively low risk. For instance, puppies who will grow into big dogs, and large dogs 6 to 18 months old might be considered high risk. A 2 year old, healthy socialized cat with no history of litter box problems might be considered low risk. Spend your staff or volunteer time for follow-up on high-risk adoptions first, then on others as you are able. Be sure to track returns to test if your risk-level assessment is on target.

Risk assessment should avoid "profiling" people, but may take into consideration expressed behavior such as expectations or experience in pet parenting. Focus mainly on the individual animal's characteristics. Typically animals in the following categories might be considered at a higher risk than others:

- Those behaviorally-challenged
- Those with medical problems (disclosed at the time of adoption)
- Younger dogs
- Animals entering a multi-pet household

THE FOLLOW-UP PROCESS

The group suggested these procedures for follow-up calls:

- Be sure to obtain verified contact information at the time of adoption – address, phone number(s), e-mail address
- Let the adopter know that someone from your agency will/may be calling to see if they have questions or problems with the pet's adjustment to the new home (but make sure they know they don't have to wait for you to call – they can call you at any time). You may want to ask for a good time of day/week to call and make a note of that
- Check the adopter and pet's file before calling to make sure you are familiar with the background of the case
- Track calls and keep notes on the date of the call, length of the call, problems brought up and your responses or referrals. Keep this in the animal's file for future reference
- Use a checklist of questions/issues to be covered – create a script for the caller to use if necessary
- Start off with questions that look for positives in the relationship
- Use questions crafted to get at specifics, rather than simply asking if there are any problems (ie; any litterbox problems? inappropriate barking? etc.)
- Be prepared with answers or referral information at the time of the call – not later
- Be non-biased, with a goal to facilitate a better bond, not judge the adopter
- For people who are difficult to reach, e-mail may be an option. However, one-to-one personal contact is preferred

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS WITH ADOPTERS – THE ULTIMATE FOLLOW-UP

A recurring theme in the two-day meeting was emphasis on the need to build a relationship with every prospective adopter. The adoption event should not be viewed as a one-time-only contact ending in either acceptance or rejection of an application. The importance of a continuing relationship is the opportunity to help the person over time to make good choices, discover and use resources to resolve problems he/she might have with a pet, look to the adopting agency as a friendly resource, recommend it to friends, and perhaps become a supporter of the work of the agency. A strong adoption follow-up program will enable you to do this, and more – because you can also learn a great deal from your constituents. Asking for continuous feedback about your own operations, image, processes, and the programs and resources you offer will help you improve them all.

Returns are not a sign of failure. In fact, having no returns may be a sign of failure, because you are not taking enough risks, giving the animals and adopters the benefit of the doubt in pursuit of a positive outcome.

RESOURCES/REFERRALS FOR ADOPTION FOLLOW-UP PROGRAMS

These are some ideas of the types of services new pet guardians may need that you can help them find. Have this type of information at hand at the time of the follow-up call. This information may also be made available on your website.

- Handouts or pamphlets on typical problems new pet owners face
- Referrals to pet-friendly housing opportunities in the community
- Either access to or referrals to animal behaviorists
- Schedule for pet parenting classes
- List of available basic dog training classes
- References to veterinary services
- References to pet sitting, dog walking, kenneling, doggie daycare services
- Carpet cleaning services or recommended products for self-cleaning
- Reference to pet product suppliers
- Breed clubs for breed specific questions
- List of dog parks in the community
- List of local animal laws
- References to pet health insurance companies
- References to pet-friendly homeowner's insurance companies
- List of grooming services
- Bereavement support, in case the worst occurs

WHO SHOULD CALL?

There were two schools of thought on who should make the follow-up contacts. One approach is for the original adoption counselor to continue as primary contact person with the adopter. This “personal banker” approach assures the primary contact is familiar with all stages of the adoption and adoption follow-up process.

On the other hand, busy adoption counselors may not have time to make follow-up calls, or may not have “clicked” with the adopter. In that case a different person would handle follow-up calls. To provide some continuity however, it makes sense for the staff or volunteer who makes the first follow-up call to stay with the case until all follow-up is completed.

The general recommendation for the timing of follow-up contacts with new adopters is:

- First contact within 3 days of the pet arriving in the home;
- Second contact 3 weeks after adoption
- Final contact 3 months after the adoption, unless additional contact seems necessary.

If the adopted pet is a puppy, the group felt it would be best to add two additional follow-up contacts at 6 months and 9 months after adoption to proactively address problems that often arise in dog adolescence.

DO WE REALLY KNOW OUR ANIMALS?

We do our best to discover the nature of the animal we are putting up for adoption, and with this information try to make a good match with a guardian. But how successful are we at predicting post-adoption behavior? The group was quite skeptical that behavior in a shelter situation represented the animal’s normal behavior. The stresses of being housed in unfamiliar quarters surrounded by other stressed animal’s may well skew an animal’s behavior. We rely on temperament assessment procedures to classify dogs because it is the best tool we have. And yet, studies in progress suggest real differences in post-adoption behavior versus shelter behavior. Foster homes give a more natural environment for behavior assessment, but everyone agreed that a cat doesn’t just “get along with other dogs and cats,” but may get along with some dogs and some cats and react very negatively to others. The truth is it may not be possible to know how well an animal fits into a new home without actually giving the new home a try.

PROGRAM EVALUATION-ANIMAL OUTCOMES

The group suggested three possible ways to evaluate the outcome of the adoption program:

MEASURING RETURNS

Currently, many agencies only track the number of adopted animals returned, considering a low return rate to indicate a successful adoption program. Realistically we know that in some cases the animal doesn't remain in the home, but is also not returned to the adopting agency. The group felt that a low return rate is not, by itself, a reliable indication of success.

Certainly statistics should be kept on returns, and the reasons tracked carefully. As discussed above, it is especially important to collect all information possible on the returned animal's behavior, likes, dislikes, interaction with children or other animals in the household, in order to improve chances of finding a permanent home with the next adopter.

MEASURING RETENTION

Retention is studied by post-adoption surveys at certain intervals to discover how many adopted animals are still in their home. Unlike adoption follow-up programs designed to trouble-shoot and provide informational and referral support to a new adopter, post-adoption surveys are statistical in nature and look at overall versus individual successes. Three or six months after the adoption would be reasonable timing for post-adoption surveys. Experience indicates that after six months, a great percentage of adopters will be unavailable for contact due to moving or other situations, making it difficult to acquire reliable data for calculating retention percentages.

KEEP IT SIMPLE

Don't collect data you aren't going to use for a specific purpose – it is too expensive and time consuming. Focus on one part of your program to evaluate in follow-up surveys one year, use the results to improve your program, then change survey questions to focus on another part of your program the next year.

Though more accurate than “returns”, “retention” surveys are also flawed vehicles for evaluating success. Again as discussed above, a certain number of adopters will rehome the animal themselves, with friends, relatives or people reached through classified ads or word of mouth. This doesn’t necessarily mean a negative outcome for the animal, but it can create a major obstacle to determining what the outcome is.

MEASURING ACTUAL OUTCOMES – GUARDIAN SATISFACTION

A most difficult, but revealing survey would follow an animal’s “trail” to the final outcome (within a time period – perhaps six months), even if that means tracking through more than one post-adoption home. Finding those secondary or tertiary homes would be easier if adopters were encouraged to report self rehoming, rather than told the only acceptable way to end the adoption is by returning the animal to the adopting agency.

- The key in this case would be to ask questions that measure the guardian’s level of satisfaction with the pet, and the facts of the animal’s current lifestyle to determine if his or her basic needs are being met.
- How well has the animal settled into the household?
- Where does the pet stay during the day; at night?
- What is the pet’s role in the family/household?
- What is the family’s level of satisfaction with the pet?
- Has the animal seen a veterinarian – for preventative care or other reasons?

PROGRAM EVALUATION-CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

Another type of follow-up is done to evaluate customer satisfaction with your adoption process. For this kind of follow-up you want to try to contact everyone who came to the shelter to consider adoption, whether the visit ended in adoption or not.

Some of the types of information you could gather in a program evaluation survey are:

We should recognize that every interaction with the public is an opportunity to educate AND to learn. We can learn while we are teaching. If we don't educate and build relationships with our clients, we aren't achieving what we could for the animals.

- The customer's level of satisfaction with the adoption process
- Suggestions for improving the process
- How people learned you have animals for adoption (word of mouth, website, saw pets at an off-site adoption location, saw the shelter building when passing by, public service announcements, etc.)
- Why people chose to adopt from your agency (good animals there; wanted to save a life, cheaper than buying, etc.)
- The number (%) of people who came in planning to adopt but did not – and why they did not (didn't have the type of pet they wanted, too expensive, animals didn't look healthy, denied, etc.)
- Which of your other services they have used (relinquished animals, report cruelty, education program at kids school, etc)
- What material/information was given at adoption that proved helpful to them in caring for their new pet?
- The number (%) of dogs that went to training classes after adoption
- How well the animal's behavior in the home matches his behavior in the shelter, or in the behavior assessment procedure
- What health problems are being seen in recently adopted animals
- Whether the customer would return to you if looking for a pet in the future
- Whether the customer would recommend your agency to others looking for a pet

The survey can be conducted by staff, volunteers, a professional firm, or perhaps by students at a university or by contract with a non-profit group providing jobs for the disabled. In a program evaluation survey, as opposed to an adoption follow-up interview, the survey taker should not answer questions. They should be trained to stick with a script, but provided with a referral number or website address to give to people with questions about animals or the shelter's services or policies.

THE EFFECTS OF A SUCCESSFUL ADOPTION PROGRAM ON YOUR ORGANIZATION AND COMMUNITY

As we increase the market share of animals adopted from animal shelters and fostering agencies, we simultaneously:

- Increase the percentage of animals in the community who are sterilized – and, most important, sterilized before they can reproduce even once
- Reduce the number of surplus pets within the community
- Increase the number of pet guardians in the community who have received some education about their pets, and now know that the adopting agency is a place to go for more information
- Increase the number of people who will choose to adopt homeless animals when they add pets to their family in the future
- Increase the number of people with positive experiences with your agency to share with family and friends in the community
- Increase the number of pets in the community with identification – either through microchipping and/or tagging before release to the adopter, or by educating the adopter about the importance of identification
- Increase compassion in the community. The fact that someone came to your agency should be points in their favor even if they don't adopt
- Increase the number of potential donors to the organization

As an added benefit, when policies are perceived as rational and fair to animals and people, fundraising is much easier! Experience has shown that people will generously support a positive, welcoming, community-interactive animal care group. As we create and maintain constructive, helpful relationships with more and more members of the community, our impact on the community's attitudes toward animals grows. Finally, we find ourselves in the best position to be the ambassadors of the humane ethic that our missions call us to be.

Unless you can gain information from interaction with adopters and learn how to do your job better, everyday at the front desk becomes Groundhog Day

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A Guide To Create A Successful Adoption Experience

Adoption counseling is about making life long matches between people and pets. Your goal will be to use appropriate communication techniques to gather information and use that information to educate and assist the public in choosing a pet.

Do not judge a book by its cover. You never know who you are dealing with or what their background is no matter how they look.

Communication is the cornerstone to any placement program. Giving the potential adopter your undivided attention during the conversation process will enable you to make the proper educated and caring placement. Remember a life is in your hands. That loving, caring soul deserves your undivided attention.

Open ended questioning, active listening and discussion will help you build a positive rapport with the adopter and will help with the education process. The old saying do not judge a book by its cover is true, you never know who you are dealing with or what their background is no matter how they look. Judgmental attitudes, spouting facts only, accusations or accusatory tones and verbally attacking a potential adopter will only result in a mutually uncomfortable situation. Be aware of your own behavior, attitude, tones and body language. As always if you are not comfortable with a situation, or do not know the answer to a question – ask a fellow adoption counselor for help or your supervisor. There are no scripts, each situation is different – empower yourself to make the right decision.

Make Eye Contact and Smile!

Greet and Welcome Each and Every Customer

- Extend the appropriate greeting to every Customer with whom you come into contact with.
- Make Customers feel welcome by providing a special, differentiated greeting.
- After initial greeting go and check on Customer in the kennels or cat rooms to see if they need assistance. They should not have to come looking for you.

Seek Out Customer Contact

- It is the responsibility of every counselor to seek out Customers who need help or assistance.
 - Listen to Customers' needs
 - Answer Questions
 - Offer Assistance

Display Appropriate Body Language at All Times

- It is the responsibility of every Adoption Counselor to display approachable body language when on duty.
 - Attentive appearance
 - Good posture
 - Appropriate facial expression
 - Clean, neat, appropriate attire

Preserve or Enhance the Exceptional Customer Service Experience

- Always focus on the positive, rather than the rules and regulations.
- Talking about personal or job-related problems in front of customers is unacceptable.

Provide Immediate Service Recovery

- It is the responsibility of the Adoption Counselor to attempt, to the best of their abilities, to immediately resolve a Customer service issue before it becomes a Customer service problem.
- Always find the answer for the Customer and/or find another staff member who can help the Customer.

Thank Each and Every Customer

Customer Relations Do's and Don'ts

Do

Have a positive attitude

Remember to thank people

Give people the benefit of the doubt

Admit and apologize for errors/delays

Get your facts straight

React to ideas not the person

Control your emotions

Project genuine, active attention

Hear others out

Limit your own talking

Think like the customer

Encourage the customer to talk

Be truly interested

Identify yourself

Keep things out of your mouth

Be enthusiastic, yet sincere

Smile, speak clearly

Set expectations in a positive manner

Don't

You must

You have to

Do you understand?

The policy is...

Vague words-very, later,

It's not my fault

Argue mentally

Jump to conclusions

Interrupt

Rush the customer

Be inconsiderate

Mumble

Talk too much

Interrogate

Listening attentively

Agreeing with customers

Finding ways to praise customers

Frame any comments, reservations or advice as to not sound like a put down

When things get contentious, go get help

Have a cheerful approach

Get involved in the conversation

Know the animals in the shelter to help make good placements

Have Canned Answers to basic questions

Treat others the way you would like to be treated

Treat each customer like they were the first customer of the day

Do not allow your day to affect the way you treat a customer

Every interaction with a person is an educational opportunity

Do not use animal shelter/behavior jargon or codes when giving answers

Be flexible-Strive for a positive solution

Be responsive to criticism and be willing to change based on feedback

Be truthful and know your facts

Be friendly and inviting

Establish rapport immediately

Tone of voice and body language helps set the tone for the conversation

Fact: When two people interact, the potential for conflict is inevitable

Conflict Resolution Tips

1. Treat the other person with respect
2. An irate person wants to know that
 - Someone is listening
 - They are understood
 - They are important and appreciated
 - They are going to be helped
 - They are talking to the right person
3. You cannot win by being irate also. The one that stays calm has control.
4. Don't take things personally
5. State your point of view briefly
6. Say what you mean and mean what you say
7. Do not withhold important information
8. Use personal experiences
9. Collaborate problem solving
 - Define the problem in terms of needs not solutions
 - Make a distinction between means and ends by determining what the ultimate goal of the resolution is.
 - Brainstorm possible solutions
10. If you must say no; give an explanation, express your feelings, provide an alternative.
11. Focus on what you CAN do rather than on what you CAN'T do.

Interfacing with the public is not always an easy pursuit. Sometimes you are pressured for time and the customer may be particularly abrasive. Here are some suggestions and tools for effective communication to help you through the rough times.

Reflective Listening

Reflective listening or mirroring is a tool to help in communicating with customers. It is a way of responding that indicates you have heard what the person has said, and promotes further dialogue in a non-judgmental way.

Customer: *I am upset that I can't take the puppy home before it is neutered.*

Counselor: *What I hear is that you are upset that you can't take the puppy home before it is neutered.*

Paraphrasing

To paraphrase is simply to repeat back in your own words the content of what the customer is saying:

Customer: *My cat, fluffy, is pretty territorial. I wonder what he'll do if I bring a new kitten home?*

Counselor: *You're concerned that Fluffy may have a hard time adjusting to a new cat in the household?*

Customer: *I have two small children at home. I don't want a dog that bites.*

Counselor: *So you're looking for a dog that will be a good companion for your kids.*

Open Ended Questions

Open ended questions are designed to elicit more than a yes or no. They often begin with how or what. Questions beginning with why also elicit more than yes or no, but can put person in the defensive.

Open ended: What will you do with the puppy while you are at work?

Closed-ended: Is this puppy going to be home alone while you are at work?

Defensive: Why do you want a puppy that is not housebroken when you work full time?

Three Levels of Responses to a Conversation

1. Denial of the message, or criticism, or abusive response. With all of these the customer will feel put down, on the defensive, and closed to further communication.
2. Accurate, non-judgmental response that answers the question but does not necessarily encourage further dialogue.
3. Good summary of content, that also touches on underlying feelings (paraphrasing), spoken or unspoken (empathy), and stimulating good rapport (open-ended questions).

Examples would include:

Counselor: *What kind of pets do you have at home?*

Customer: *I have a 10 month old lab mix and she's going to have puppies soon*

Level I, Inappropriate response: Why weren't you responsible enough to have her spayed?

Level II: When an animal isn't spayed it's almost impossible to keep her from getting pregnant, even when you take precautions.

Level III: It's probably going to be hard to find good homes for those pups. Have you thought about having your dog spayed, so she won't become pregnant again?

Counselor: *What kind of dog are you interested in?*

Customer: *I am looking for a guard dog.*

Level I, Inappropriate response: We don't adopt out guard dogs here

Level II: So you want a dog that will be protective of you and your property.

Level III: People think of guard dogs in a lot of different ways. Could you help me to understand what you mean by guard dog?

Counselor: *Is there anyone in your household who may be allergic to cats?*

Customer: *My husband says he sneezes around animals, but he's hypochondriac, so I have not told him I'm getting a cat.*

Level I, Inappropriate response That's a pretty inconsiderate thing to do to your husband not to mention the cat.

Level II: So you have not spoken to your husband yet?

Level III: It sounds like you really want a cat even though you are not sure what your husband will say.

Remember, we do not discriminate or turn people down for an adoption due to race, sex, age, language, or the way the person looks or dresses. Also remember to assess the situation and gather all the facts fully before making rash judgments. It is always helpful to consult with another adoption counselor or supervisor before making these decisions.

It is unrealistic to think that the shelter failed when the adoption didn't work out. Don't beat yourself up; animals and people behave differently at home than in our shelter.

The Adoption Process

- Is respectful of the adopter's experience and knowledge and assume both of you come from a place of commonality wanting to help animals
- Takes a conversational approach with open-ended questions such as "What are you looking for", "What's your lifestyle", etc.
- Is a discussion, rather than a series of barriers that applicants must overcome in order to get an animal
- Focuses on success, and creating a relationship with the customer
- **Looks for a way to approve an adoption, not turn one down**
- **Treats each potential adopter and animal as individuals**
- Uses guidelines to encourage discussion and education, not as inflexible mandates
- Emphasizes the resources the shelter can provide to help solve any problems that arise
- Emphasizes that post-adoption contact from the adopter is welcomed and returns are acceptable

Remember – if the adopter can provide a safe atmosphere for the pet then allow the adopter to decide if they can handle the behavior by setting expectations.

What is A Successful Adoption?

1. The match is suited to the individual animal and family
2. The pet is afforded appropriate veterinary care
3. The pet's social, behavioral, and companionship needs are met
4. The pet has a livable environment (including appropriate food, water, shelter, etc)
5. The pet is respected and valued

Adoption Counselor's intuitive judgment

While a counselor's intuitive judgment of a potential adopter should be given weight, it must not be allowed to sink into the realm of prejudice. Automatically rejecting a certain type or group of people from consideration as adopters is discriminatory and reduces the number of homes available to animals without taking the time to even evaluate the individual. We must be conscious of our personal bias and filters.

Chaining

We oppose the idea of chaining a dog outside 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. However, if the dog is only outside for a short period of time and is retrained by a cable run or tie out because they do not have a fence, this is not by itself a reason to decline an adoption. You should work with the adopter to come up with a plan that meets his needs and the needs of the pet. Please understand and know the risks of chaining a dog outside before trying to educate someone on other possible alternatives.

Guard Dog/Mouser

You should first determine whether you and the potential adopter are speaking the same language. By "guard dog", you may be thinking of an underfed, neglected dog guarding a salvage yard. The adopter may mean a dog who barks when anyone comes to the door. "Mousing" could be more of a hoped-for behavior from the family cat than the primary reason for seeking a new pet.

Outside Dog

The question is not simply whether or not the dog will live solely or primarily outside, but rather how the dog's social and companionship needs will be met. Mitigating factors may be the presence of other animals (dog, horse, etc) the dog can play with, and how much time the dog will spend with his adopter (i.e., how much time does the adopter spend outdoors; how do they plan to spend time with the dog during the cold or really hot months?) Also, we might consider that many a dog meant to sleep outside has wagged and wiggled his way indoors – often right into the adopter's bed.

Landlord Permission

It is the Adopters responsibility to know and understand their landlord policies. Rather than acting as a detective in this case, you can counsel them and trust the adopter to make a good decision. The adopter is the one taking the risk.

Pet History

While a past failed human/pet relationship may raise red flags it should not by itself prevent an adoption. Ask simple open ended questions such as “What has changed in your circumstances”, “What if anything would you have done differently”, by keeping an open mind and allowing people to explain you might learn they have already thought about the problem and found solutions. As far as checking with their Veterinarian, it is not required and should only be used as a tool for you to find out more about the person’s pet history if you have concerns. If a potential adopter has no history of pet ownership, a discussion on expectations may help start the relationship off well. In addition, more follow-up support may be needed after the adoption.

Outside Cat or Inside/Outside Cat

This is a good example of a requirement that leads applicants to lie to the adoption counselor. Ultimately, we can not control this situation. A reasonable expectation may be that the adopter understands all the dangers of letting a cat outside, the importance of always having ID on the pet, and the shelter’s strong preference that cats be kept indoors or let outdoors under supervision only. If the adopter wants a cat for a pet, and plans on letting her go outside unsupervised, at least the cat will be spayed or neutered. The same may not be true if the adopter acquires a cat from another source.

Declawing

Declawing is just one solution that people can use as a means to stop destructive scratching by their cat. This by itself is no reason to decline someone from adopting a pet. It is however an ideal opportunity to educate them on other means of controlling the problem. Some people just don’t know they have other options that work or understand why declawing may not be the best choice.

We should recognize that every interaction with the public is an opportunity to educate AND to learn. We can learn while we are teaching. If we don’t educate and build relationships with our potential adopters, we aren’t achieving what we could for the animals.

Thank you to Maricopa County Animal Care and Control and to Petsmart Charities for their Report on Adoption Forum II. A lot of the information in this manual was gathered from these two organizations.



Getting an Edge in Retail

Some shelters are learning that it's smart to provide supplies along with pets

When someone adopts a pet, their first stop on the way home from the shelter is often the pet supply store, where they can pick up all the accessories to make their new family member feel right at home. Bowls. Leashes. Toys. A crate. A cute collar. Personalized ID tags. Sweaters. Coupons for therapy, to help the animals get over the shame of wearing sweaters.

It's all available, and new adopters often have a blast picking out the items that, in their minds, make their new pets feel more like their own. Buying these supplies can help cement the newly formed bond, and many of the supplies—such as a good collar, ID tags, and healthy food—are crucial components of being a responsible pet owner.

Some shelters are realizing that, by allowing new adopters to wander off to find their supplies elsewhere, they've been missing several golden opportunities: The chance to ensure their clients are going home well-equipped; to ensure they have the right kind of supplies (and to steer them away from shock collars and other troubling items); and to make a little money that they can use for their programs and animal care expenses.

Many shelters have maintained a small retail space for years, selling a mishmash of pet supplies, T-shirts, and other odds and ends, with mixed success. But some have really invested in the concept of selling pet supplies at the point of adoption, and have seen the financial benefits roll in. And through collaboration with the P.S. (Profits for Shelters) program run by the dealer services division of PetEdge, a pet supply company, some animal welfare organizations have found ways to build a small retail space into something attractive and appealing to clients—and into major moneymakers for their programs.

The Greater Birmingham Humane Society's new facility opened in 2004, and has kept space for retail since the beginning, according to director of operations Jerett New. At first, the space was managed by an auxiliary group that supports the shelter, and offered picture frames and other knickknacks to visitors. Gradually, though, shelter staff



The Greater Birmingham Humane Society's new shelter opened in 2004, and it's had a retail space from the beginning. Adopters can buy their pets the basic supplies they need for responsible pet ownership, such as a variety of toys, leashes, and collars.

have taken over and have been offering the basics for responsible pet care.

"We don't provide a lot of the little frilly this, that, and the other," says New. "We try to provide exactly what we use here"—maintaining that consistency helps the animals feel a little more familiar in their new homes, he notes—"so we have rope toys, hard-rubber toys, and things like that. ... Leashes, collars, all the necessities we'd like for the animals to leave with."

At the Animal Humane Association New Mexico (AHNM), thrift store and retail space contribute to the shelter's coffers. All told, the organization has four outlets that brought in around \$440,000 in sales last year; the shelter's profits boil down to about 15 percent of that figure.

"Our sales have grown 10 to 20 percent every year," says Gary Weddle, director of retail operations. According to Weddle, AHNM offers only premium food to custom-

ers, thereby modeling the kind of supplies it wants animals to get in their new homes.

Both AHNM and Greater Birmingham have their retail areas placed where adopters and visitors can't help but see them as they enter the shelter. And New says that managing the store doesn't add a lot of work for staff. A volunteer puts in 20 to 30 hours a week helping keep the store clean and price items, but most of the sales are done by adoption counselors.

"At the time of the adoption with the customer doing the payment, they actually do that payment inside of our retail store," says New. "We pull them in there where they can not only pay for the adoption, but see all of the supplies as well."


The shelter mandates that every animal leaving be confined, so if an adopter didn't bring a collar and leash for their new adult dog, or didn't bring a carrier for a new cat or puppy, adoption counselors at the shelter ask

them to purchase the items on-site. It might be something clients would protest, but New says that the shelter keeps its prices highly competitive, undercutting local retailers substantially and offering basics like leashes, collars, and crates as close to cost as possible.

Both shelters have found their relationships with PetEdge, whose Profits for Shelters program uses a tiered system of services for its clients, highly beneficial. Larger shelters that can move more product to clients will likely realize the most benefits—essentially, the more an organization purchases from PetEdge, the more it gets back in the form of product discounts, free shipping, and merchandizing advice from retail experts.

That's a large part of how Lucy Bernardin, account executive and shelter specialist at PetEdge, spends her time. "The account managers don't only do sales—we work closely with customers," says Bernardin, noting that "with shelters, there's a lot of handholding. ... A lot of volunteers [who help run some shelters' retail areas] have no retail experience. They love animals but don't understand merchandizing. And the paid staff wear about 10 hats."

Bernardin helps PetEdge's shelter clients figure out ways to maximize their space and move more product; she even does on-site consults for larger clients, helping them to figure out the best place to put retail displays and make the areas appealing to customers.

For shelters, says Bernardin, including retail space is a no-brainer and should be part of the considerations for any organization thinking of building a new facility. And with the economy in its current state, she notes, nonprofit shelters should look at their operations and acknowledge that while they'll always rely on donations, there are other ways they can bring in money to support their programs and save more animals' lives. 

To learn more about the PetEdge Profits for Shelters program, go to PetEdgeDS.com/ps, email shelters@PetEdge.com, or call 888-230-1555.



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Save Lives with Feral Freedom

A guide to the Feral Freedom program



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Save Lives with Feral Freedom

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Save Lives with Feral Freedom

One of the keys to bringing about a time of No More Homeless Pets® is reducing the number of cats currently dying in shelters nationwide. In most communities, at least 50 percent of the animals entering shelters are felines and on average only three out of every 10 cats leave alive. Sadly, in many shelters, only one in 10 cats survive.

But there is a proven way to save those cats' lives. This step-by-step guide describes how the City of Jacksonville Animal Care & Protective Services (JACPS) and First Coast No More Homeless Pets (FCNMHP) worked together to make it happen, and how you can do it, too.

Written by First Coast No More Homeless Pets director and founder Rick DuCharme with assistance from Best Friends Animal Society, this guide provides an inside look at the Feral Freedom program, which has dramatically reduced the number of cats dying in the Jacksonville, Florida, city shelter. It describes how the program began and evolved, and helps you assess whether Feral Freedom is a good fit for your community, along with providing step-by-step guidelines for planning and implementing your own program. There's also detailed information about the Jacksonville program and an appendix with documentation that your community can use. It is our hope that Feral Freedom will become a model for other successful lifesaving efforts around the country.

At its roots, Feral Freedom is a trap/neuter/return (TNR) program for "community cats" — free-roaming feral, stray and lost cats who live outside and don't belong to anybody. As detailed in this guide, reducing the number of cats killed in shelters requires a community-wide effort and commitment. But the results are well worth it: It saves your community money, and it saves the lives of thousands of cats, bringing us all one step closer to achieving a time of No More Homeless Pets.

The Beginning of Feral Freedom

When First Coast No More Homeless Pets was founded in 2002, about 70 percent of the 33,000 dogs and cats entering Jacksonville's shelters perished. At the time, many people thought that our mission of decreasing and eventually eliminating the need to euthanize animals simply because they had no homes was an impossible dream.

During our first year, we introduced SpayJax, a high-volume pet sterilization program targeting low-income people with pets. Within months, the city shelter experienced a decrease in admissions. Additional targeted spay/neuter programs followed, with the highest volume focusing on feral or community cats. Also in 2002, Jacksonville Animal Care & Control (as it was then called) and the Jacksonville Humane Society began performing sterilization before adoption instead of adopting out pets with spay/neuter vouchers.



Thanks in large part to these measures, over the next six years, shelter admissions dropped 30 percent and shelter deaths decreased by nearly 50 percent. Although this was certainly great progress, one continuing frustration remained: Despite spaying or neutering several thousand cats each year, a significant number of unaltered feral/community cats were still entering the city shelter and being euthanized. Shelter admissions of pet cats and kittens and dogs and puppies had decreased dramatically, but feral/community cats were continuing to drain the city's resources and those of other local animal welfare organizations.

In 2008, Ebenezer Gujjarlapudi, Jacksonville's director of environmental and compliance, was appointed interim chief of Animal Care & Protective Services. An engineer by trade without animal welfare experience, he researched all aspects of animal shelters, including the impact of feral cats. The Feral Freedom program came about as a result of his ability to think "outside of the box" and seek practical solutions. His unique perspective on the problem, untainted by past involvement, led to the development of an effective solution to the issue of free-roaming cats in Jacksonville.

Under his leadership, a new policy was introduced: Feral and community cats would no longer be killed in the city shelter. Instead, all feral cats coming into the shelter would be turned over to FCNMHP or other animal welfare organizations. These organizations would sterilize, vaccinate, microchip, ear tip and return the cats to their territories. This new policy would save around 3,300 cats deemed "feral" each year. In the past, these cats would have been housed for the mandatory holding period and then euthanized, all at substantial taxpayer expense. But on August 1, 2008, the first feral cats were transferred from the City of Jacksonville to FCNMHP. Cats who previously would have been killed in the shelter were instead returned to their territories alive, but were no longer able to reproduce.

Quickly, a problem arose, which was immediately addressed. At first, cats deemed "feral" because they were aggressive or frightened in the traps were allowed to be transferred to the Feral Freedom program and live, while "friendly" cats from the same neighborhood, living outdoors under the same circumstances, were euthanized simply because they did not "act feral." To remedy this inequity, guidelines for cats admitted to the program were changed. If they had been living outside with no specific home and doing well on their own, friendly "community cats" were also transferred to the Feral Freedom program. This natural progression addressing the needs of all outdoor cats expanded the program's volume to around 4,500 community cats each year. This change quickly

and effectively reduced the number of cats dying in the shelter by 50 percent!

Also during the first year, microchipping, which had failed to provide much usable data, was discontinued, allowing that expense to be reallocated toward helping more cats. In addition, a rule that animal control could choose not to transfer cats who were captured more than three times was dropped. Under the new policy, if an animal control officer in the field came across an ear-tipped cat in a trap, the cat would be released.

Step One: Understand How Feral Freedom Works

Before determining if Feral Freedom is a good fit for your community, you'll need a basic understanding of how it works. The steps outlined below provide an overview of the tasks involved in running the program. A more detailed description of how the program works is provided later in this guide. (See Step Three: Work in Partnership.)

Simple steps to Feral Freedom:

1. Residents rent traps from Jacksonville Animal Care & Protective Services (JACPS) to trap "nuisance" cats.
2. Trapped cats are brought to the JACPS shelter by residents or picked up from residents and transported by the animal control officer. Basic information about each cat is obtained to assist in determining the cat's final disposition and in returning community cats to their territories.
3. Each cat is put through the regular admissions process and admitted to the shelter. At that time, the cat is evaluated for the Feral Freedom program based on the information gathered and inspection of the cat.
4. Cats destined for the Feral Freedom program are sent to an isolation room and remain in their traps. Information about each cat, including the location where the cat was trapped, is written on the cage card that is attached to the trap.
5. Cats are transported twice a day to FCNMHP. Cats never remain at the JACPS shelter for longer than four hours.
6. Cats are sterilized, vaccinated for rabies and FVRCP, treated for fleas and ear mites if needed, and ear-tipped.
7. Cats are kept overnight and given a meal both that evening and the next morning before being returned to their territories.
8. Door hangers explaining the program are left at the homes surrounding the area where the cats are released.

Step Two: Do Community Assessment and Planning

What are the goals of the program?

As part of the planning process, each community needs to decide on its own goals for the program. In Jacksonville, the short-term goals were to dramatically decrease shelter deaths by returning outdoor community cats to their territories and to decrease shelter admissions and shelter costs by sterilizing community cats. The long-term goal is to decrease and ultimately eliminate cats living outdoors on their own, in the most effective, inexpensive and humane way possible.

Sterilization, vaccination and minor medical treatment make outdoor cats healthier and safer, but unable to produce unwanted litters. In addition, the chance of these cats becoming nuisances is greatly reduced once they've been sterilized and vaccinated. By implementing a Feral Freedom program, your animal control department can also reduce its costs, along with the number of cat-related complaint calls it receives.

If these goals are consistent with your community's goals, Feral Freedom is a proven, effective, and humane program you may want to implement. But to be successful, the program requires sufficient support from both the community and local government administration. The questions and information below, based on Jacksonville's experience, will help you determine if Feral Freedom is the right match for your community.

How many cats would qualify for the program?

To determine the resources required for the program, you first need to estimate the number of cats expected to qualify for Feral Freedom each year. Don't assume that the number of cats being euthanized in the shelter as "feral" is the same as the number of cats who will qualify for the program.

Out of 13,365 cats entering Jacksonville's city shelter in 2007, around 3,300 were deemed feral and euthanized for that reason. Because it was quickly realized that cats who were deemed feral weren't the only ones who could qualify for the program, the term "community cats" was embraced. Feral Freedom was expanded to include all free-roaming cats who had been living outside and doing well on their own, whether they were feral or friendly. During the first two years of the Feral Freedom program, FCNMHP worked with approximately 4,500 cats annually.

The only cats considered ineligible for the Feral Freedom program are those who are surrendered by a family, indoor cats, declawed cats, those too unhealthy to return to the streets, and kittens too young to fend for themselves.

Residents bringing one or more cats to JACPS are asked several questions about each cat. This information is used to determine the cat's final disposition: eligibility for the Feral Freedom program, adoption or euthanasia. The city's intake staff do not volunteer information about the Feral Freedom program unless they are directly questioned about what will happen to the cat. This policy curtails complaints and unproductive discussions at admissions. The city also provides the service of picking up and transporting cats from residents who have trapped them. When picking up cats from residents, field officers obtain the required information and follow the same policy as intake staff at the shelter.

Which groups will participate?

One of the first steps in planning a Feral Freedom program is to take an inventory of the animal welfare organizations in your area, including any existing trap/neuter/return (TNR) groups, and to determine how these groups can work together. Who is going to be the lead agency for this program? What additional assistance is needed from other groups? Are there existing groups that are willing and able to provide that assistance? Which groups might be able to grow their organizations to assist in a large project?

Ideally, the government-run and -funded animal control agency should take the lead in a Feral Freedom program. Since most large municipal shelters have their own spay/neuter facilities in-house, they are well positioned to provide the most efficient implementation of the program. In addition, animal control agencies typically have transport vehicles and staff for the pickup and return of trapped cats.

It's important to contact interested animal welfare groups and address their concerns before the program begins. All animal welfare groups share the goal of reducing the number of animals dying in the shelters, and this program is definitely a big step in that direction. Because of the minimal number of feline adoptions and rescues from Jacksonville Animal Care & Protective Services (JACPS), often the shelter staff have to decide whether a cat should enter the Feral Freedom program or be euthanized. Sadly, there are usually no other options. When explained in those clear terms, it is very difficult for any serious animal welfare group to disapprove of the program.



After agreeing to undertake the Feral Freedom program, FCNMHP contacted other major groups and were fortunate to find a willing partner: The Jacksonville Humane Society helped launch the program by transporting cats from the JACPS shelter to FCNMHP's clinic during the first year of the program.

What resources are available and needed?

Transport. As mentioned above, trapped cats are brought to the city shelter by residents or field officers who pick them up from residents. Cats transferred to the Feral Freedom program are transported from the shelter to the FCNMHP clinic twice a day, once at noon and again just before the shelter closes for the day, after all officers are in from the field. This ensures that no cats are left at the shelter overnight, minimizing the risk of disease transmission. The day following surgery, the cats are returned to the trapping location and released.

This process requires that drivers are on the road seven days a week; surgery is performed six days a week; and cats are housed at the clinic every day. Ideally, cats do not remain in traps more than three days. If longer-term housing is required, the cats are transferred to cages using feral dens.

FCNMHP's fleet of vans comprises three cargo vans equipped with rear cargo area climate control, non-

skid bed liners in the cargo area, and a safety divider between the driver and cargo areas. The fleet is also used for transporting other animals to the spay/neuter clinic. One van is dedicated to the program and staff have access to two other vans as needed for releasing large numbers of cats.

Staffing. It is difficult to judge the number of staff who will be needed to efficiently run a Feral Freedom program, but it is important to estimate and plan for adequate staffing. The Jacksonville program currently budgets about 60 hours per week of staff time for the program. The majority of that time is focused on transporting and caring for cats. Since JACPS admits cats six days a week and the clinic does surgeries six days a week, Feral Freedom staff must work seven days a week, caring for and releasing cats.

In the beginning, much of the program director's time was required to mediate complaints from residents about cats being returned to their territories. After two years, complaints are rare and less than 20 percent of the program director's time is now spent on ensuring that Feral Freedom runs smoothly.

When FCNMHP first agreed to take on the Feral Freedom program, the organization had only four employees. Before launching the program, three staff members were added. It was definitely worth the investment, since the program saves the lives of thousands of cats each year, and is far more effective than mass euthanasia.

Surgery capacity. One of the biggest challenges of running a Feral Freedom program is having the available surgery capacity required to alter cats when they are admitted. In Jacksonville, about 20 cats are typically transferred to the clinic daily, but the number varies. To avoid keeping cats in traps for extended periods, the program needs to have an available daily surgery capacity of between 20 and 50 cats.

Surgery capacity is defined as the resources needed to perform surgery, even if the surgery does not take place. Given that staff and overhead expenditures far exceed the cost of surgical supplies, maintaining the required surgery capacity when it is not always needed is an enormous drain on resources and a significant challenge for the program. These expenses can be mitigated by performing feral cat surgeries at the end of the day and holding some cats overnight in large cages if necessary. This allows FCNMHP to frequently operate the clinic at full capacity, while still sterilizing Feral Freedom cats in a timely manner. If an unusually high number of animals come in for surgery, the

clinic also has the ability to call in relief veterinarians or ask some of the staff surgeons to work extra hours to increase capacity.

Funding. FCNMHP's portion of the program costs about \$50 per cat, including transport from the shelter, surgery and care, and transport back to the cat's territory. This figure does not include startup costs, which cost FCNMHP approximately \$42,700. (See the budget in the appendix.) At the same time, JACPS saves \$50 per cat by no longer having to care for the animals for the mandatory five-day holding period and not spending funds to euthanize and dispose of the cats. The City of Jacksonville continues to pay for the loan of traps, transport to the shelter and intake costs. Since these costs were already the city's responsibility, Feral Freedom required no additional government funding. In fact, by strategically re-allocating some of its resources, the city could theoretically support the entire program.

A collaborative, humane effort involving several groups allows the work to be shared and may attract additional resources such as private foundation and volunteer support. Dedicated long-term funding is vital to ensure sustainability for a Feral Freedom program. And sustainability is a key factor in securing grant funding.

Although no funding was given initially by the city to support the program, FCNMHP and the Jacksonville animal welfare community could not pass up the opportunity to save all of the feral/community cats entering the city shelter. Fortunately, Best Friends Animal Society provided a generous three-year grant to help fund the program, along with the expertise and support of Best Friends' knowledgeable staff.

As a result, in 2010, the City of Jacksonville, recognizing the effectiveness of the program, enacted an ordinance that provides a solid source of funding for the future, mainly through licensing revenue.

What local ordinances need to be considered, if any?

Each community should assess its current animal-related laws to determine if they need to be updated to be consistent with the Feral Freedom program. The Jacksonville ordinances pertaining to leash laws and "pets at large" conflicted with a program focused on TNR. It wasn't until almost two years after the launch of the program that caring for feral and community cats was formally legalized and specifically recognized in the city code.

Of course, every location is different and ordinance revisions or adoption of a pilot TNR project may be required before implementing a Feral Freedom program in your community. Decisions about whether or not a new ordinance is needed often rest with the local head of the animal control agency.

The new Jacksonville city ordinance includes these definitions of "community cat" and "feral cat":

Community Cat means any free-roaming cat that may be cared for by one or more residents of the immediate area that is known or unknown; a community cat may or may not be feral. Community cats shall be distinguished from other cats by being sterilized and ear tipped; they are exempt from licensing requirements.

Feral means a wild animal that exists in an untamed state or that has returned to an untamed state generally not socialized to human contact and is no longer considered domesticated. Feral animals shall include, but not be limited to cats, dogs and hogs.

The new ordinances also allow for the care of these animals either in managed colonies or individually in communities. All Jacksonville community/feral cat ordinances are included in the appendix.

What about gauging public support?

Concerns about potential opposition need to be considered when launching a Feral Freedom program. To avoid attracting negative attention or complaints, we decided to quietly establish the program and prove it was successful before actively seeking publicity.

The support of three of Jacksonville's major animal welfare groups was a key factor in positively shaping public opinion and the attitudes of policymakers toward the Feral Freedom program. The city's Animal Care & Protective Services, the Jacksonville Humane Society and FCNMHP were all solidly behind the program and provided a coordinated response to the media and others researching the feral cat issue.

Like most places, Jacksonville had dealt with issues surrounding community cats over the years, consisting mainly of conflicts between the former animal control department and colony caregivers. These situations were quickly remedied when the agency adopted the new community cat policy. In the first two years of the Feral Freedom program, there were fewer than two dozen serious complaints about the program from Jacksonville residents. In each of these cases, the city administration stood behind the program and the concerns quickly dissipated.

A year after launching Feral Freedom, when it had been proven successful in saving lives as well as city resources, the *Florida Times-Union* ran a front-page story about the program. The article generated many positive comments, and only a few negative ones.

What other feral cat programs are available?

Before forming a coalition to establish a Feral Freedom program, survey existing feral cat resources in your community. To maximize its impact on saving lives at the shelter, the Jacksonville program targeted only those cats entering the shelter system. It is important to have alternative TNR resources available for residents caring for feral cat colonies. The Feral Freedom program didn't have the resources to offer free TNR services to anyone. The program is intended to address population control and management of "nuisance" cats who are already living in the community.

Will other local TNR groups support a Feral Freedom program? Are any of them able to participate in the program? Organizations that are already working with feral cats are uniquely suited to support this program and should be tapped for support as much as possible.

How can this program be sustainable?

Obviously, long-term sustainability of the program is essential. To begin a program like this and then to have to discontinue it would be a real tragedy. Finding the seed money to initiate a Feral Freedom program is an important first step, but most funders now require a sustainability plan before distributing grant money, especially for large new programs. To assure sustainability, commitments of resources and services from the government-funded animal control agency, non-profit animal welfare groups, and/or private funders must be secured in advance.



Step Three: Work in Partnership

This section provides a more detailed look at how First Coast No More Homeless Pets (FCNMHP) and Jacksonville Animal Care & Protective Services (JACPS) work together to save thousands of cats each year. If you're planning to implement a Feral Freedom program in your community, then it will be very helpful to have a deeper understanding of each group's roles and responsibilities, as well as additional details about how the program works.

At the shelter

During the shelter intake process, information about each cat, including the location where the cat was trapped, is obtained and written on the cat's cage card. Cats destined for Feral Freedom are segregated from all other shelter cats as soon as possible after admission to minimize the risk of disease transmission. Feral Freedom cats are also moved out of the shelter to FCNMHP as quickly as possible.

Once cats are selected for the program, they are left in the traps they arrived in or put in traps and placed in a segregated room at JACPS for pickup. A copy of each cat's cage card must be attached to the trap. The cage card includes any known information about the cat and, most important, where the cat was trapped, so he/she can be returned to his/her territory. Without this information, the cat will be disqualified from the program. If no cage card is attached to the trap, transport staff must obtain the required information before taking the cat. (Since the shelter staff are well trained, this is rarely necessary.)

Of course, if your animal control agency operates as both a shelter and the spay/neuter clinic, cats can be transferred to the segregation area immediately with no need for transport to a separate facility.

Transferring cats

Cats are picked up at the shelter for transport to FCNMHP twice daily, at noon and right before closing at 4:30 p.m. This ensures that no Feral Freedom cats stay at the shelter for more than a few hours and never overnight. It also maximizes the savings for JACPS by freeing them from having to care for the animals, and delivers the cats to FCNMHP quickly, so surgery can be performed and the cats can be returned to their territories as soon as possible. Cats picked up from JACPS in the morning are usually operated on that afternoon, and returned to their territories the next day.

FCNMHP is lucky enough to have the flexibility to respond to demand as needed. Since the flow of cats from the public is unpredictable, it is difficult to schedule staff who both transport cats from JACPS to the clinic for surgery and also return cats to their territories after they have recovered. The workload of the transport staff not only depends upon the volume of cats entering the program, but also on the number of cats having surgery. If the clinic gets behind in surgery, the flow of cats for return may be disrupted.

Surgery

At its spay/neuter clinic, FCNMHP annually handles over 5,000 feral cats brought in by the public in addition to approximately 4,500 Feral Freedom cats. When the Feral Freedom program began, the clinic had only 800 square feet of space. It has since moved into a larger facility, but staff have found that the size of the clinic isn't as important as the capacity. Many cats can be handled in a relatively small space when needed.

Ideally, the clinic that will be performing surgery for your program will also have some experience with handling feral cats; if not, handling techniques can be easily learned. As always, handling animals is much easier when the proper equipment is available. FCNMHP uses feral cat traps, feral dens, isolation forks and cat squeeze holders. Other equipment that may be helpful in specific situations are transport cages and large housing cages.

Ideally, cats should have surgery within 24 hours of entering JACPS. Cats who stay longer require additional care and cleanup, which consumes additional resources. Extended stays also increase the cat's stress level and should be avoided whenever possible. Every evening that cats spend at FCNMHP, they receive a meal of canned cat food mixed with water in an attempt to keep them hydrated. The cats also receive a meal the morning they are returned to their territories.

For longer stays: moving cats from traps to dens

As previously mentioned, cats kept longer than 72 hours are transferred from traps to suitable cages for the duration of their stay. The goal is to get cats into surgery and back to their territories within 48 hours of arrival from JACPS, counting the day of pickup and the day of release. So, for example, cats picked up on Tuesday would have surgery on Wednesday and be returned to their territories on Thursday.

When a cat needs to be transferred from a trap to a larger cage with a litter box, feral dens from Animal

Care & Equipment Services (www.animal-care.com) are used. A feral den is lined up with the trap and the cat is transferred from trap to den. The entire den is then placed into a larger cage in a cage bank. Once the cage door is securely shut, it is easy to reach in with an extension and lift the trap door on the feral den, allowing the cat to exit into the cage.

Although most of the cats remain in the dens while staff are present, many of them will exit the den to use the litter box or to stretch a little when staff are out of the room. When it is time to transfer the cat back to the trap for surgery or return, the trap door is lowered while the cat is in the trap and the cat can then be transferred or transported.

Volume of cats

It is important to keep in mind that with this type of program, the volume of cats presented for surgery will vary. Some days, no cats or only a few are received from animal control; other days, the program receives as many as 60 cats or more. With scheduling software, surgery is planned for 10 Feral Freedom cats each day, knowing in advance that this projection is seldom accurate. The Feral Freedom cats round out the clinic's schedule and fill in for no-shows and late cancellations of surgeries for animals brought in by the public.

The clinic can quickly become the choking point for the program if it becomes overwhelmed with a large number of cats. Surgeries for owned pets and feral cats brought in by the public are scheduled each day in addition to surgeries for Feral Freedom cats. If everyone shows up for surgery (instead of the projected 20 percent no-show rate), if more walk-in feral cat surgeries are required than expected, and/or if the Feral Freedom volume is higher than normal, surgery can get backed up pretty quickly. Fortunately, the clinic staff can call in relief veterinarians as extra surgeons or ask some of the staff surgeons to work extra hours to handle the increased volume.

If the clinic plans on an average of 20 cats entering the program each day that animal control is open, then it needs to have the ability to easily house 60 cats on a regular basis and the flexibility to handle many more on a temporary basis whenever there is a flood of eligible cats to animal control or if the surgery schedule gets backed up. For this reason, the clinic has extra-wide hallways and some storage space that can be turned into a temporary cat holding space.

Returning cats

Each morning the transport driver starts off by feeding the cats who will be released that day. While the cats

are hopefully enjoying their meal, the driver maps out the route. Using Internet mapping services and their knowledge of the city, the drivers map out the most efficient routes for returning the cats to their territories.

When returning cats to their territories, the drivers put door hangers on the houses surrounding the release site. The hangers inform residents about the program and advise them that ear-tipped cats have already been through the program and there is no need to trap them. The door hanger includes information about living with community cats. (A sample door hanger is included in the appendix.)

The transport crews are also responsible for cleaning and sterilizing traps used for transport and release. They keep JACPS well-stocked with traps for transferring community cats, whether they arrive at the shelter in traps or not. Care of Feral Freedom cats and cleanup in the clinic is mostly handled by the transport staff, with some backup from the clinic kennel staff.

Both JACPS and FCNMHP maintain stocks of traps and some intermingling takes place, but every effort is made to keep the traps separate. Using different brands of traps is helpful. This challenge could easily be solved by establishing a joint stock of traps that could be used by both participating organizations.

Public relations

As mentioned earlier, it's important to have an official policy that all involved agree upon and use when responding to public or media inquiries. This policy must hold up under pressure and be appropriate for discussing the program with people on either side of the issue. Jacksonville's policy is that trapping and killing cats year after year had no impact on reducing the number of cats in the community. This new, more effective method of handling feral and community cats was introduced and it is now the city's policy.

Relocation of the cats is not a realistic option in most cases. It is difficult to get them to stay in a new, unfamiliar location without effort and resources, which are generally not available. The biggest argument against relocation is simply the fact that nobody really needs or wants more feral cats. Relocation is simply moving a problem from one area to another. The goal of the program is to completely eliminate the problem of cats living outside on their own and not to just move the problem from one location to another.

Although the city's current policy is to trap and return community cats, residents don't have to simply tolerate unwanted cats. Callers who complain about

nuisance cats on their property are educated in ways to humanely discourage cats from living where they are not wanted. At the start of the program, Feral Freedom stocked up on motion sensor sprinklers and offered handouts about other products to keep cats off property, but most people expressed little interest.

After the first year, there were very few complaints from citizens. The complaints that are received are often about specific cats in a yard rather than concerns about the overall program. It is essential to always make sure callers understand that there are really only two options for outdoor cats: either trap/neuter/return or trap and kill. Relocation or adoption are not viable options.

Frequently, complaints turn out to be related to domestic disputes, in which one member of the family is feeding the neighborhood cats and another member does not want the cats around. If someone isn't already feeding the cats, it is recommended that an alternative food source be provided or that whatever is attracting the cats be removed from the property.

This policy is consistent with the way the city handles complaints about raccoons or squirrels. The city does not remove these animals from residents' property, and outdoor cats will not simply be removed either. Assistance is offered in trapping the cats and sterilizing them in an effort to decrease and eventually eliminate outdoor cats. The program also offers advice on how to exclude cats from residents' property. For example, callers are counseled to use a hose or glass of water to scare off the cats. Only humane alternatives are offered, not the trapping and killing of cats.



Step Four: Visit Jacksonville to See Feral Freedom in Action

Although reading about the program provides great insight, seeing Feral Freedom in action is the best way to truly understand how it works. To help other communities implement similar programs, First Coast No More Homeless Pets and the Jacksonville Animal Care & Protective Services welcome visits from key personnel. If you can cover travel-related expenses, FCNMHP staff will arrange for a tour of their facility and the JACPS shelter, and arrange meetings with the program manager, shelter intake staff and others involved in Feral Freedom. You'll also have the opportunity to ride with the staff who transport and release cats. During your visit, you'll meet, talk with and learn from people who are saving more than 4,500 cats a year!

Please coordinate your plans with FCNMHP well in advance, so that arrangements can be made to make your visit as productive as possible. At least a two-day visit is recommended. For more information or to schedule a visit, contact info@fcnmp.org.

Reporting back what you saw and learned will help ensure that everyone involved is on the same page when the Feral Freedom program begins. Some confusion and resistance is expected whenever an important change in public policy is introduced. Open communication among all involved will help minimize these issues.



Step Five: Meet with All Groups Involved to Set Final Policy Guidelines

Before launching a Feral Freedom program, all participating groups need to agree on policy guidelines — how the program will work in your community. The questions below provide a framework for some of the important decisions that must be addressed. Additional information based on our experience in Jacksonville is also provided with the hope that it will be helpful to other communities.

What services will be provided?

When the Jacksonville program was launched, it initially provided more services for cats than it does today. Originally, each cat received spay/neuter surgery, rabies and FVRCP vaccinations, flea and ear mite treatment, and microchipping. The program no longer microchips the cats and now only provides flea and ear mite treatment if needed. Thanks to the support of a generous donor, the program has been able to continue providing FVRCP vaccinations to all cats.

Who does what?

It's important to define what duties each participating organization will be responsible for and to make sure that everyone understands and agrees. For example, here is how the responsibilities for loaning out traps and taking in cats from city residents are handled in Jacksonville: Since the Feral Freedom program targets cats that residents consider a nuisance, cats can only enter the program through animal control (JACPS). Even before Feral Freedom began, JACPS rented traps to residents who wanted to capture nuisance cats on their property. Residents can rent a trap by completing a form and leaving a deposit. When the trap is returned, the resident gets the deposit back. The deposit is equal to the cost of the trap, so if the trap is not returned, the transaction becomes a sale (the resident keeps the trap and the city keeps the deposit).

What information is required at intake?

It is vital to obtain information about each cat to determine whether the cat will qualify for the Feral Freedom program. Suggested questions: Is this an owned pet? What address is the cat coming from? Has the cat been seen in the neighborhood before? Is someone in the neighborhood feeding this cat and/or others? Did the neighbors move away and leave the cat behind? If so, when did they move and how has the cat been surviving since then?

What should people dropping off cats be told?

As previously mentioned, it is not advisable to volunteer information about the program, unless someone dropping off a cat specifically asks, "What will happen to the cat?" During the first several months of the program, animal control officers and intake desk staff told people dropping off nuisance cats that the cats would be sterilized and returned. This resulted in many heated discussions and complaints from citizens. So, JACPS decided to take cats in and gather the needed information without getting into the specifics about what would happen next. This policy has resulted in far fewer complaints and less stress for the staff involved.

It is ironic that a policy once used to hide the truth of euthanasia (don't ask, don't tell) is now being used to avoid discussions of lifesaving programs. Even now, shelters seldom tell people what is going to happen to the animals they are relinquishing to the shelter, and most people don't want to know the animal's fate. The same policy can and should apply to a Feral Freedom program.

Which cats are eligible for the program?

Each community needs to determine which cats will be accepted into Feral Freedom and who will decide if incoming cats qualify for the program.

It is essential to obtain information from each person dropping off a cat to determine if the cat qualifies for the Feral Freedom program. The Jacksonville program guidelines evolved to include those cats who had been living outdoors and seemed to be doing well, whether they appeared to be feral or friendly upon intake. Initially, any cat who arrived at the shelter in a trap was accepted into the program. But it soon became clear that many cats who would otherwise qualify for Feral Freedom were brought to animal control in carriers, boxes or even in people's arms. Since it was unfair to exclude those community cats just because they didn't arrive in traps, the program was quickly expanded to include them.

When Feral Freedom was launched, rigid guidelines were set for cats who would qualify for the program. This was done with the expectation that the animal control staff might exclude eligible cats from the program simply because they were resistant to a new way of doing things. Although this may have been the case very early on, the staff quickly learned that given the choice between ensuring a cat who might be eligible was selected for the program or euthanizing that same cat, it was better to choose to let the cat live.

This may very well be the essence of the program: Should a cat be given a chance at life or face a certain death to save the cat from an unknown fate that some people suppose to be worse than death? With that said, it is vital for the integrity of the program, and in the best interest of the cats, that cats unable to live on their own after being returned to their territories not be selected for the program.

Infrequently, cats admitted to the Feral Freedom program cannot be returned to their territories. Cats who will not do well living outdoors on their own, which includes cats who are declawed, blind or too young to fend for themselves, should not be returned. If your organization does not handle adoptions, you will want to have strong relationships with one that does. In Jacksonville, Feral Freedom partners with Lucky Cat Adoptions, Inc., a nonprofit group that finds homes for Feral Freedom "dropouts" and other cats. A few other local cat rescue groups also take some of these cats.

What medical issues prevent cats from being returned?

Again, each community must set its own policy for how they will handle community cats with medical issues and which conditions they have the resources to treat. FCNMHP is fortunate to have some limited space to house community cats who need to recover from treatable medical conditions or procedures in addition to spay/neuter surgery. Cats with conditions such as abscesses, eye problems or tail amputations sometimes require extra time and care to recover. If responsible caregivers are available, these cats can often be returned to their territories after healing. If space is not available, local rescue groups may be an option for cats requiring special care.

What are the benefits of forming partnerships?

Working in partnership to create a Feral Freedom program has obvious benefits. Funders prefer to support coalitions working together to reduce the number of pets who die in shelters. Solutions can be found more quickly when different groups work together toward a common goal. Partnerships also help establish the long-term relationships required to make real progress toward the day when there will be No More Homeless Pets. The three large animal welfare groups in Jacksonville have met regularly since 2000 to discuss issues. These strong relationships have been invaluable in working together on Feral Freedom and other potentially controversial projects.

It's vital to select suitable partners. All partners must

have the ability to hold up their end of the program and be committed to making it sustainable. Good partners work together to ensure the program runs smoothly. For example, if an unusually high volume of cats comes in, JACPS notifies FCNMHP so that extra transports can be assigned. And if a large number of cats are being picked up, animal control officers contact the clinic while they are still in the field to give advance notice and preparation time.

Although the ideal situation is for the local animal control agency to handle most, if not all, aspects of this program, financial constraints often limit a government agency's ability to enhance its services. If this is the case, local nonprofit animal welfare organizations need to assume responsibility for saving the lives of community cats. In Jacksonville, private funding was used to launch the program, with the hope that a steady funding source would be designated once the program was proven successful.

Step Six: Take Action to Implement Feral Freedom in Your Community

Now that you've learned all about Feral Freedom and have assessed your community's ability to implement and support a similar program, what are the next steps? If you are the local animal control agency responsible for cats entering the shelter and are willing to handle all of the responsibilities from transport to surgery, then most of the preparation and implementation will be internal. If you are a nonprofit TNR group or humane organization, then you will need to work with the animal control agency and other animal welfare groups to ensure sufficient surgery capacity and the smooth operation of the program.

Implementing a Feral Freedom program usually requires collaboration to best use each group's available resources. It is best to work together on the community assessment and jointly plan your program. Before launching Feral Freedom, it's essential that each partner's role and responsibilities be clearly defined, and that all parties agree on goals, policies, budget and funding sources.

Here is a step-by-step guide for implementing a Feral Freedom program in your community:

Meet with all groups involved. Go to each of the groups whose support and/or participation will be

required to make the program a success. The open-intake animal control facility that admits feral/nuisance cats must be a participant because that organization takes in the greatest number of cats from the public.

You'll need to work together to make final decisions about each group's role: Who will provide surgeries? Who will provide transport? Expertise in TNR is helpful, but keep in mind that traditional TNR often emphasizes colony management and works closely with cat caregivers. Feral Freedom releases cats back to the location where they were trapped, without identifying a caregiver, but with the presumption that the cats will continue to do well in that setting. Although these two approaches differ, partnering with other TNR groups to achieve the goal of a long-lasting decrease in the outdoor cat population is very beneficial. These groups can identify cat caregivers, help them fix the remainder of the cats in their colonies, and assist with other colony management issues.

Set project goals. Decide what outcomes you want from this program. Do you hope to dramatically decrease the number of cats dying in the shelter, decrease cat-related complaint calls to animal control, and/or decrease overcrowding in the shelter? The Jacksonville program's initial goal was to fix and return feral cats to their territories, resulting in all of the above outcomes. It quickly became clear that "feral" was not a broad enough term for the cats being trapped and brought to the shelter. "Community cats" soon became the term used to describe all free-roaming outdoor cats — feral or friendly — who were eligible to be accepted into the Feral Freedom program.

Approximately half of the animals entering the Jacksonville shelter are cats, and generally about half of all cats who enter the shelter are eligible for the Feral Freedom program. So, by implementing the Feral Freedom program, it was possible immediately to decrease shelter deaths by 25 percent and reduce the number of cats euthanized by 50 percent!

Assess and use existing resources. The main components of the Feral Freedom program include cat acquisition, transport, sterilization and medical treatment, and public and media relations. Many of these activities are already taking place in your community. The cats this program targets — those whose behavior has become a nuisance — are probably already being trapped and turned over to animal control. There may be an existing spay/neuter clinic with excess capacity or the ability to add capacity. Or there may be organizations with transport vans or other equipment that could be used for the Feral Freedom program. To

achieve your program goals in a cost-effective way, you'll need to assess and use existing resources as much as possible.

There will probably be resources that are not available in your community or may only be available for a short time. If that is the case, you will need to determine how to obtain these required resources, what they will cost, and how to fund them.

Determine needed funding and sources. Feral Freedom saves money. In fact, a 2010 study commissioned by Best Friends Animal Society shows that millions of dollars could be saved if communities across the country implemented TNR programs instead of trapping and killing community cats. (To learn more and figure out how much your community could save, go to the Fiscal Impact of TNR Calculator on Best Friends' website at felines.bestfriends.org.)

As mentioned before, what's most efficient is for the animal control agency to take ownership of the entire program. The savings realized through a decrease in shelter admissions and euthanasia can be used to offset any additional program costs. There will also be lower cat transportation costs. Dedicating animal control's savings toward a Feral Freedom program is vital to the sustainability of the program. The Feral Freedom program does not create any revenue for the operators, so it must be wholly subsidized. As covered earlier in this guide, if your community's government-funded animal control agency is not willing initially to fund the program, you'll need to seek out sources of private funding to launch and support Feral Freedom.

In Jacksonville, 4,500 cats were saved during each of the first two years, at a cost of \$49.23 for each life saved. The total annual budget for the Feral Freedom program was \$221,450, including transport of the cats from the JACPS shelter to FCNMHP, surgery and other medical expenses, and return of the cats to their territories. The budget did not include any of JACPS' expenses since those impound costs were already being incurred. By preventing 4,500 cats a year from being euthanized, the Feral Freedom program saved JACPS \$175,000 annually. These savings resulted from no longer having to hold cats for the mandatory five-day period, a reduction in the amount of drugs and staff resources spent on euthanasia, and reduced body disposal fees.

Be prepared. Before launching Feral Freedom in your community, you'll want to make sure that all staff members involved are trained and have the necessary equipment and forms needed to make the program

successful. It's important that they know what information to obtain from residents turning in community cats, as well as how to answer any questions or complaints. As part of the training process, it may be helpful to mentally and physically do several dry runs of the first day to ensure that everyone is well prepared.

Step Seven: Measure Success

Saving money is always good, but the best measurement of Feral Freedom's success is the number of lives saved. In addition to saving the lives of community cats admitted to shelters, Feral Freedom reduces the number of felines who enter shelters and the number of kittens born in the community cat population. And, when half or more of the community cats entering shelters go into the Feral Freedom program, the remaining cats have a much better chance of being adopted or taken out of the shelter by local rescue groups.

We hope that your community will decide to implement the Feral Freedom program and give community cats entering your shelter the chance to live. Thank you for all you do to help animals and for bringing us closer to a time of No More Homeless Pets!



Appendix

Jacksonville Community/Feral Cat Ordinances

At one time, language inserted into the city ordinances stated that if the city had a feral cat program, those cats would be exempt from other ordinances that might prohibit them. This simple sentence allowed feral cat programs to go unhindered for a period of time and this was what allowed the Feral Freedom program to get started legally. In 2010 the city was working on a complete overhaul of all the animal ordinances, including parts that pertained to feral/community cats. Changes included definitions of key words pertaining to community cats, related new ordinances and a sustainable source of funding. Other communities are welcome to model their definitions and ordinances on the ones detailed below.

Community cat means any free-roaming cat that may be cared for by one or more residents of the immediate area that is known or unknown; a community cat may or may not be feral. Community cats shall be distinguished from other cats by being sterilized and ear-tipped; they are exempt from licensing requirements.

Feral means a wild animal that exists in an untamed state or that has returned to an untamed state generally not socialized to human contact and is no longer considered domesticated. Feral animals shall include, but not be limited to cats, dogs and hogs.

Harbor means the act of caring for and keeping an animal or the act of providing a premise or residence to which the animal returns for food, shelter or care for a period of at least ten (10) days, or at the point where the caregiver is providing the primary source of sustenance for the animal; whichever time is shorter. If the City establishes a program for the maintenance of feral or community cats, those persons maintaining those cats will be regulated in accordance with such program.

Stray means any animal that is found to be at-large, whether lost by its owner or otherwise, or that is on the common areas of apartments, condominiums, trailer parks or other multi-residential premises, and that does not have an identification tag and for which there is no identifiable owner; however, if the City establishes a program for the maintenance of feral cats, feral cats may be treated as other than stray.

Community Cat Management Initiatives

The City of Jacksonville recognizes the need for innovation in addressing the issues presented by feral, free-roaming and other community cats. To that end it recognizes that there are community caregivers of cats, and acknowledges that properly managed community cats may be part of the solution to the continuing euthanasia of cats; and establishes the following requirements:

1. All managed community cat colonies/groups must be maintained on private property of the caregiver, or with permission on the private property of another landowner (including city, state, and federal public property).
2. A free community cat caregiver certification program may be developed to educate people about community cats, the importance of a veterinary provider relationship to best address community cat needs, disease and care, good practices, and maintenance. The educational program shall be developed by community veterinarians, community cat caregivers, JACPS and citizens through an ad hoc advisory committee that will be disbanded upon recommendation to the Chief of JACPS. The Chief of JACPS may remove any member at any time for any reason within his/her discretion. Periodically, ad hoc committees will be convened to review, revise and update the program as needed.
3. All cats that are part of community cat management programs must be sterilized, vaccinated against the threat of rabies, and ear-tipped (preferably on the left ear) for easy identification; if these requirements are met, the community cat is exempted from licensing.
4. If a person is providing care for the community cats, he or she is required to provide certain necessities on a regular/ongoing basis, including, but not limited to, proper nutrition and medical care as needed. If medical care is unavailable or too expensive, the caregiver must not allow the cat to suffer.

- i. Food must be provided in the proper quantity for the number of cats being managed and is to be supplied no less than once per day (twice is preferred). Food must be maintained in proper feeding containers.
- ii. Water, if supplied, must be clean, potable and free from debris and algae.
- iii. If shelter is provided, it shall be unobtrusive, safe, and of the proper size for the cat(s).

In 2010 the City of Jacksonville included in the ordinances the revamping of a former spay/neuter trust fund with the wording below. We expect that this trust fund will provide funding for both the Feral Freedom and SpayJax programs into the future.

Spay and Neuter Trust Fund

There is created the Spay and Neuter Trust Fund, a permanent trust fund of the City, into which shall be deposited monthly monies derived from the fees generated by license fees. The first eight dollars (\$8) shall go into the general fund to cover costs of licensing program and outsourced fees as applicable; the next two dollars (\$2) from each license shall be deposited in the Animal Care and Protective Services Veterinary Services Trust Fund, Section 111.455; the remaining monies, beginning with the eleventh dollar collected per license, shall be deposited in the Spay and Neuter Trust Fund.

There shall also be deposited into the Spay and Neuter Trust Fund all funds forfeited under Section 462.309, fines collected for failure to confine a female dog or cat in heat under Section 462.307 with any other monies which may be from time to time appropriated to this trust fund by the Council, or monies, gifts, or donations donated by non-governmental sources. The monies deposited in this trust fund are to be appropriated by Council and shall be utilized and expended, solely for the administrative costs of running the licensing program, education/promotion of sterilization and programs created and established in Section 462.703.

Monies deposited in this trust fund shall be available for expenditure notwithstanding fiscal years and shall not lapse at the end of any fiscal year. Expenditures from this trust shall not exceed actual revenues received at any time. The Director of Finance is authorized and directed to make disbursements from this trust fund upon the written request of the Director of Environmental and Compliance, or his designee, with respect to expenditures permitted by Section 462. Furthermore, the Director of Finance shall be responsible for maintaining all required accounting records, making the proper disbursements, and providing any required financial information, including notifying the Director of Environmental and Compliance, or his designee, of the exhaustion of appropriated funds available for expenditure in this trust fund.

The Animal Care and Protective Services Division shall give to the Health, Welfare and Human Services Committee an annual report as to the disposition of the monies of this trust fund.

Importance of a Comprehensive Set of Sterilization Programs

Some individual spay/neuter programs can be effective at decreasing shelter admissions and deaths; the Feral Freedom program is certainly a great example of this. For any spay/neuter program to have the maximum impact on shelter populations, though, it must be part of a comprehensive set of neutering programs. This is what we have strived to create in Jacksonville. Listed here are the types of spay/neuter programs that we offer:

- Neuter before adoption: no pet leaves the shelter unaltered
- Low-income targeted programs, which require documentation of income
- Feral Freedom program: every neuter is a life saved
- Trap/neuter/return programs at low cost to the general public
- Low-cost, high-volume spay/neuter for the general public
- Targeted programs for problem populations

Cost/Benefit Analysis

As mentioned in this guide, a 2010 study commissioned by Best Friends Animal Society shows that millions of dollars in taxpayer costs could be saved if communities adopted Feral Freedom–type TNR programs instead of trapping and killing community cats. Learn more about the study by reading this article on Best Friends’ website: “New Research Exposes High Taxpayer Cost for ‘Eradicating’ Free-Roaming Cats.” You can find the article here:

network.bestfriends.org/golocal/maine/14688/news.aspx

To figure out how much your community can save by implementing TNR programs, go to felines.bestfriends.org to access the Fiscal Impact of TNR Calculator. In addition to quickly calculating the savings associated with trap/neuter/return programs for community cats in your city, county or state, it also provides local and general TNR talking points.

Sample Feral Freedom Budget

This budget assumes annual overall feline admissions at 6,000 cats with half of them qualifying for a Feral Freedom–type program. It plans for 3,000 cats per year coming through the program, or an average of 57 cats weekly or nine daily.

EXPENSES	COST
Transport van, new	\$25,000
Van modifications	3,000
Trap supply (200 @ \$65 per trap)	13,000
Feral dens (20 @ \$85 per den)	1,700
Total startup costs	\$42,700
Staff (60 hours per week @ \$9 per hour)	\$28,080
Payroll taxes, workers’ compensation	2,000
Gas, maintenance	850
Food, cleaning supplies	8,000
Auto insurance	1,560
30 traps (shrinkage)	1,400
Forms, brochures, printing	1,950
Surgeries (3,000 @ \$45 per surgery)	135,000
Total annual operating costs (approx.):	\$178,840

Additional Resources

Best Friends Animal Society: www.bestfriends.org

Best Friends’ website provides information, networking opportunities and continuing education. It includes lots of information on spay/neuter, community/feral cat programs and access to experts in all fields of animal welfare. On its cat initiatives page (felines.bestfriends.org), there’s a link to the Fiscal Impact of TNR Calculator, which lets you figure out how much your community can save by implementing a Feral Freedom–type TNR program. You can also find information about grant opportunities on the No More Homeless Pets Network page (nmhpnetwork.bestfriends.org).

Maddie's Fund: www.maddiesfund.org

This website provides information about grant opportunities, an advertising campaign promoting pet adoption from shelters, and many other resources for animal shelters.

SpayUSA: www.SpayUSA.org

All things spay and neuter can be found on this website, including extensive information on the SpayJax program and other targeted spay/neuter programs. The site also has a lot of information on feral cats and their care.

Alley Cat Allies: www.AlleyCat.org

This website offers comprehensive information on every aspect of feral cat programs, including advocacy, colony care, ordinances, public opinion, veterinary care and ongoing updates on what's happening in the feral cat world.

Neighborhood Cats: www.neighborhoodcats.org

This website is another great resource dedicated to topics related to trap/neuter/return. Perhaps most notable is the page that shows all ordinances that impact feral cats state-by-state.

Tru-Catch Traps: www.trucatchtraps.com

This website sells the traps used in the Jacksonville Feral Freedom program: model 30LTD, a trap for cats, skunks and rabbits. Feral Freedom also uses the divider forks (for isolating a cat into one end of the trap to administer injections) sold on the website.

Animal Care Equipment and Services: www.animal-care.com

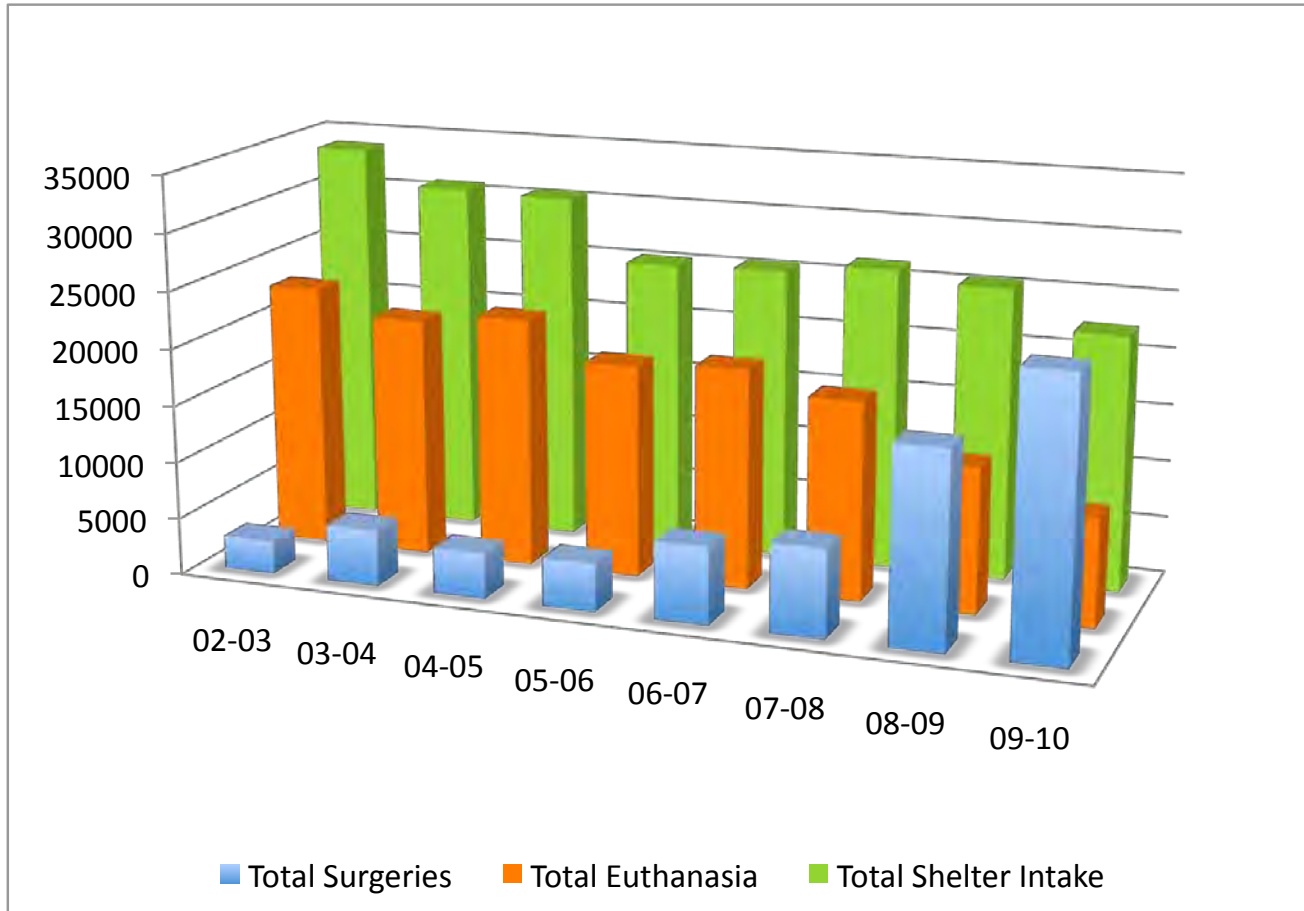
This website sells feral dens, nets, tongs, gloves and other equipment you might find helpful in handling feral cats. (Remember, the best way to handle feral cats is to not handle them at all until they are sound asleep.)

A&R Warehouse Equipment, Inc.: arwarehouseequipment.com

This company sells the custom shelving that FCNMHP uses to house large numbers of cats in traps.

The graph and chart below show how increasing the volume of spay/neuter surgeries affects admissions and euthanasia statistics


(Shelter data combines data for JACPS and Jacksonville Humane Society shelters)




	02-03	03-04	04-05	05-06	06-07	07-08	08-09	09-10
Total Surgeries	2,910	4,937	4,000	4,232	6,775	7,744	17,062	24,111
Total Euthanasia	23,104	21,004	21,886	18,690	19,242	17,430	12,744	9,500
Total Shelter Intake	33,847	30,862	30,658	25,355	25,616	26,443	25,603	22,359

Sample Feral Freedom Door Hanger

(Distributed in neighborhoods where cats have just been returned)



TRAP / NEUTER / RETURN



Jacksonville's new approach to
FERAL CAT
 POPULATION CONTROL
FERAL FREEDOM

904-425-0005 | www.fcnmhp.org

What is A Feral Cat?

The City of Jacksonville has a new approach to controlling the feral cat population - **Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR)**. This program will directly affect the number of stray, outdoor and feral cats on our streets and help Jacksonville get its outdoor cat population under control.


What is TNR? (Trap-Neuter-Return)

Outdoor cats are humanely trapped and brought to Animal Care & Control. Instead of being euthanized, these cats are turned over to FCNMHP for sterilization, vaccination, microchipping and left ear tipping. The left ear tip is the universal symbol of a sterilized feral cat. If trapped again, it could simply be released because you would know that it has already been fixed. Once removed from their vet care, the cats are returned to their home territory to continue living out their lives. Relocation doesn't work, removal of cats from an area opens up the territory for new cats to move in (this is known as the vacuum effect).

Trap-Neuter-Return is the most effective solution to controlling the feral cat population.

- It costs less taxpayer dollars to sterilize than to kill feral cats.
- The population will be controlled with no new litters.
- Population will decrease as feral cats live shorter life spans than inside cats.
- The cats are vaccinated against disease.
- Annoying behaviors like howling, fighting and marking territory will stop or decrease dramatically.
- It's humane.

Visit www.fcnmhp.org for more information on feral cats and tips for a better life for you and the cats in your neighborhood. Call us today to learn more about the low cost spay/neuter surgeries and pet wellness services that we provide.



NEED HELP?
 CALL OUR HOTLINE
904-425-0005
 6817 Norwood Ave., Jacksonville, FL 32208


Sample "Tips for Living with Feral Cats" Brochure

(Educational brochure that can be distributed to the public)


Working Together To Solve This Problem

It's easy to coexist with neighborhood feral cats. If you are willing to take a few small steps you can not only help these cats become good neighbors, you can help drastically reduce the feral cat population problem.

Visit www.fcnmhp.org for more info on feral cats and tips for a better life for you and the cats in your neighborhood.



NEED HELP?
 CALL OUR HOTLINE FOR ASSISTANCE
904-425-0005





Your support helps us continue these vital programs.

MAIL YOUR DONATION:
 6817 Norwood Avenue
 Jacksonville, FL 32208
 Checks Payable to: FCNMHP

DONATE ONLINE OR BY PHONE:
www.fcnmhp.org
 or call 904-425-0005

SPONSOR A TILE:
 In memory of or in honor of your loved ones, order online at www.fcnmhp.org


FCNMHP Spay/Neuter Clinic and Wellness Clinic is located in the Joseph A. Strasser Animal Health & Welfare Building.
 We are a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization making your donation 100% tax deductible!

TIPS FOR LIVING WITH FERAL CATS IN YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD

Working towards a day when there are truly no more homeless pets!

904-425-0005 | www.fcnmhp.org



LIVING WITH FERAL CATS

Not everyone enjoys living with cats in their yards. However, these simple tips will help you coexist with your neighborhood cats. There are simple solutions to any problems feral cats may be causing you or your property.

PROBLEM- Cats are digging in my garden.
Reason: It is a cats natural instinct to dig and deposit in soft or loose soil, mulch or sand.
Easy Solutions:
 - Scatter fresh orange or lemon peels, spray with citrus fragrance, or add coffee grounds or paper tobacco as natural deterrents that will not harm your garden.
 - Plastic carpet runners, chicken wire, or lattice type patterns are also deterrents.
 - Add rocks to your garden bed.
 - Put stones have nails or spiky that are safe for cats and gardens.

PROBLEM- Cats are sleeping under my porch, shed, etc.
Reason: They are looking for dry warm shelter.
Easy Solutions:
 - Block open areas with lattice or chicken wire, be sure to search for anyone hiding first.
 - Provide a shelter like a small doghouse hidden away.

PROBLEM- Cats are getting into my trash.
Reason: Cats are scavengers and are looking for food.
Easy Solutions:
 - Place a tight lid on your trash can.
 - You or your neighbors can feed the cats. Cats that are not hungry will not scavenge. Feed during daylight hours at a consistent time in an out of the way place.


SPRAY NEUTER HOTLINE
904-425-0005
www.fcnmhp.org

PROBLEM- Cats are climbing on my car.
Reason: Cats like to perch on high ground.
Easy Solutions:
 - Putting cat shelter and food in a secluded place discourages them from climbing on your car.
 - Put an appropriate cover on your car to put an immediate end to complaints.

PROBLEM- I smell cat urine.
Reason: Tom cats spray to mark their territory.
Easy Solutions:
 - Ductify TNR-neutered cats have less urge to mark and it also makes urine less pungent.

PROBLEM- Feeding cats attracts insects and odors.
Reason: Food is left out too long or at inappropriate times.
Easy Solutions:
 - Keep the cat feeding area neat to avoid insects.
 - Feed cats at a designated time during daylight hours. Only provide enough food to last in one sitting. Remaining food should be taken in before twilight.

PROBLEM- Cats are yowling, fighting, and having litters.
Reason: Yowling and fighting are mating behaviors. Cats that have not been sterilized will breed prolifically.
Easy Solutions:
 - Spaying and neutering cats will reduce the sex drive hormones causing these behaviors.
 - Male cats will stop competing.
 - No more litters.
 - Typically within 3 weeks the hormones have left the cats system and behaviors usually stop entirely.



Community Evaluation Form

1. Name of lead organization:
2. Organization contact phone:
3. Organization contact email:
4. What geographic area do you intend to cover with your program (county, city, etc.)?
5. How many open-intake animal shelters are in this geographic area?
6. List all the open-intake shelters, with addresses and contact information:
7. What is the overall intake of these shelters?
8. What is the overall cat intake of these shelters?
9. How many cats deemed "feral" are entering the shelters each year?
10. How many adoption-guarantee shelters are there in your area?
11. List all the adoption-guarantee shelters, with addresses and contact information:
12. What is the overall intake of these shelters?
13. What is the overall cat intake of these shelters?
14. Do these shelters accept feral cats? <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO If yes, what do they do with them?
15. What is the policy of shelters that accept feral cats on the outcome of those cats? Are ear-tipped cats returned to caregivers?
16. Do any of the open or limited intake shelters offer spay/neuter services? TNR programs? <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO
17. Are there organized TNR groups in this area? <input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO What services do they offer? What resources are available?
18. What local ordinances are relevant to TNR and community cats? Will they have to be changed? Are there policies at animal control that will have to be changed?

Trap Loan Agreement

Initials	By my initials/signature below and my receipt of the traps listed below, I acknowledge the following:
	1. Traps are the property of First Coast No More Homeless Pets and will be returned to the pickup location no later than the date shown below. I acknowledge that if I fail to return the traps on time and in good condition, I will lose rental privileges in the future.
	2. The value of each trap is \$100. I will be depositing \$100 for the use of the trap. I will be responsible for the full value of the trap, plus any costs of collection and attorney's fees necessary to secure its return or replacement. I agree that the traps I am receiving today are in good working order. I understand that if the traps are not returned in similar condition, I will forfeit my \$100 deposit for each trap not returned in good working order.
	3. I understand that any animal, even sweet tame cats, can be dangerous when trapped and I agree NOT to open any trap, stick hands or fingers inside a trap or handle any trapped animal unless specifically instructed. I release First Coast No More Homeless Pets and its staff, volunteers and facilities from any liability for any injuries or damages that I may incur or cause while trapping, confining, transporting, or releasing these cats.
	4. I will NOT use the trap to capture any owned cat, or for any other unlawful act, and will only use it for the purpose of spay/neuter procedures or other necessary medical treatment of a FERAL cat. Under no circumstances shall this trap be used to capture a healthy animal for destruction or surrender to animal control agencies. I will indemnify First Coast No More Homeless Pets and its staff, volunteers, and facilities from any liability based on my use of the trap.
	5. I agree to ensure that spayed/neutered cats will receive food, water, and necessary care following surgery and will be humanely returned to the same location where it was trapped. I acknowledge the possibility that once released, some cats may not return.
	6. I understand that traps are only loaned for a period of 2 weeks. If I need more time, the loan period may be extended by another 2 weeks if no one is currently on the waiting list. If there is a waiting list, I will return the traps by my original due date and my name can be added to the waiting list.
	7. I understand that I can only borrow 2 traps at a time.
	8. I agree to return the traps listed below in clean condition. I will clean the traps with a 20:1 solution of water: bleach to sterilize and remove any debris or garbage from inside the trap before returning it.

CHECKOUT DATE:	RETURN DUE DATE (<i>2 weeks from checkout date</i>):
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DEPOSIT DUE		
Total number of traps: _____	Deposit due: \$ _____	Trap numbers: _____
Check number: _____	Visa/MC number: _____	Exp. date: _____
Received by FCNMHP staff member: _____		

DEPOSIT RETURNED	
Date: _____	Returned by: _____
Trap numbers: _____	

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone: Home () _____ Work () _____ Cell () _____

Signature: _____ Date: _____


By signing this agreement, you agree to all the above conditions. You also authorize us to deposit your check or charge your credit card if the traps are not returned by their due date and/or in good condition.

The ASV Guidelines in Real Life

PART FOUR:

The Foster On-Deck System at the ARL of Boston

BY SANDRA NEWBURY, D.V.M.



In 2010, the Association of Shelter Veterinarians (ASV) released a document several years in the making: *Guidelines for Standards of Care in Animal Shelters*. Developed by a roster of veterinary experts, the standards are designed to “balance animal welfare science with practical and realistic recommendations for shelters,” and to provide a vision based on the needs of animals, which, the authors noted, remain the same regardless of how individual organizations’ missions and resources may differ. Here, we feature the fourth in a series of stories using real-life shelter examples to demonstrate how the ASV guidelines can be applied within the sheltering and rescue field to create better and more humane outcomes for the creatures we care for.

When kittens who are too young to be adopted show up at the shelter, what if all you needed to do was call the person who signed up to take foster kittens that day to say, "They're here!"?

What if, instead of putting the kittens in a general housing area at the shelter, introducing them to whatever infectious diseases and stressors might be waiting, you could examine the kittens, screen them for potential problems, and send them right into the protective care of a trained foster parent?

What if you could schedule all the points of care the kittens will need before they even leave the building?

This kind of efficient system can be put in place, with some hard work, proactive recruitment, and excellent planning. The payoff for the kittens lasts them a lifetime. And there's a positive ripple effect for all the other animals in the shelter, which can be measured in increased capacity for care, decreased risk of infectious disease, more time for enrichment, and even opportunities for improved housing.

This kind of system is at the heart of population management. According to the Association of Shelter Veterinarians' *Guidelines for Standards of Care in Animal Shelters*, "Population management describes an active process of planning, on-going daily evaluation, and response to changing conditions as an organization cares for multiple animals. Effective population management requires a plan for intentionally managing each animal's shelter stay that takes into consideration the organization's ability to provide care ... "

This example is not just a dream. In 2010, the Animal Rescue League of Boston (ARL-Boston) worked with the UC Davis Koret Shelter Medicine Program to implement the Foster On-Deck System as part of an overall feline population management strategy. Assistant manager Melissa Tanguay coordinated the program. Tanguay reports that the shelter has "seen such a positive difference from managing our foster program in a more proactive way: happier staff, happier foster parents, and healthier foster animals. It has been a win-win for everyone."

So how did they make it happen?



Planning Pathways

The ARL-Boston has worked to develop pathway planning, a crucial element of making this kind of program work. Pathway planning is a method of actively tracking each animal's shelter stay from the moment they arrive (or even before) to the moment they leave.

The idea behind pathway planning is that each animal is on the road to an outcome from the very beginning, and in order to make that outcome positive, each step should be anticipated, scheduled, and completed on time. Capacity needs and limits (such as staffing, housing, and other resources) can be evaluated for each individual pathway, helping to target priorities or identify problems.

Pathway planning does not mean an animal can't change direction; it just means that each animal is understood to be going somewhere, with a plan in place for how to get there. Pathway plans for each animal should be evaluated daily. The pathways themselves should also be monitored regularly to be sure they are running smoothly. For example, is the adoption pathway backlogged with animals waiting for spay/neuter? What's causing the delay? How can it be eliminated? Would rearranging the clinic's schedule help?

Many shelters have developed innovative lifesaving systems for getting animals through the shelter quickly and efficiently. These systems use good management and proactive planning to reduce risk for the population as a whole and for the individual animals.



No Surprise is a Good Surprise

Here is a hypothetical example of the kind of planning that can allow a shelter to save more lives: Say a woman calls to say she has found a healthy, friendly, 6-week-old male kitten and plans to bring him into the shelter that afternoon.

This shelter knows that, due to laws in its particular state, it will not be able to place the kitten up for adoption for another two weeks. Rather than have the kitten come in, a shelter staffer calls an "on-deck" foster parent, who has signed up and received training at the beginning of the season. Knowing that they're next in line, the foster family is already prepared to accept the kitten.

The kitten is evaluated at entry by intake staff and found to be in good condition. He is checked for a microchip, vaccinated, dewormed, and screened for infectious diseases. His picture is posted in the shelter and on the shelter website. The shelter cross-checks any reports of lost kittens. The foster parent (or, if the shelter has created one, an on-call foster kitten delivery service) arrives later that afternoon to transport the kitten to his foster home.

The intake staff schedule an appointment for the kitten to come in for an exam and to get neutered, revaccinated, and dewormed before being made available for adoption in two weeks. If the kitten is reunited with his lost family, the

appointments will be cancelled. This same scenario goes on multiple times a day, all week long.

In this example, a pathway of foster-to-adoption is planned even before the kitten enters the shelter system. Assignment to that category was made based on an understanding that the kitten was healthy, friendly, and too young for adoption. If circumstances change—for example, say that at intake, the staff discover the finder did not accurately describe the kitten—the pathway may change.

In this example, there are several critical points where the kitten will need some kind of care to be able to continue along the pathway toward adoption. The kitten will need an intake exam; pick up for fostering; foster care; an exam upon his return from foster care; neutering; and placement in an adoption housing unit (unless he gets adopted directly from his foster home). Waiting time at any of these points of care will cause the length of stay for the kitten to grow longer.

As the guidelines state, “Adequate staffing must be available to ensure that each critical point of service (e.g., vaccination or medical evaluation, spay/neuter surgery, or a physical move to adoption) is delivered promptly. Delays resulting in even one to two additional days of care may result in crowding and poor animal welfare in facilities that operate near maximum capacity. Expected demand for these critical points of service should be estimated based on the expected numbers of animals who will need each service and the length of time it takes to complete each procedure (e.g., number of animals needing evaluation or spay/neuter surgery prior to adoption).”

The worst place for a delay to occur is in the shelter. Kittens have higher susceptibility to disease and require specialized care to keep them healthy and happy. The best place to have delays would be while the kitten is in foster care—but even in foster care, extended stays will mean a longer time for space to open in that foster home, and thus a decrease in capacity. Additionally, in many communities, kittens tend to have the best chance of adoption when they are very young, so delays in making this kitten available may decrease his potential for adoption.



The Planning Process

ARL-Boston has done an excellent job of planning this pathway to make its Foster On-Deck system work. Its first assessment was to compare intake numbers to likely outcomes for kittens. Based on previous years' statistics, the shelter believed it would be able to place most healthy kittens coming in—if it could keep them healthy.

Early in the year, well before kitten season, shelter staff evaluated data to estimate how many of the entering kittens would likely need foster care because they were stray or too young. ARL-Boston realized it would need, on average, the capacity to allow one litter each day to go to foster care throughout kitten season.

Tanguay and her team created a written plan, including a list of goals in several categories. (Their goals were comprehensive enough to include a category for foster parent appreciation—an important element of continued recruitment!) They proactively recruited foster homes, increasing capacity for care. They trained foster parents and assigned them to tiered levels of care difficulty. And they created the Foster On-Deck System, so that foster parents would be ready and waiting when kittens came in.

They created an online document that shows foster parents and ARL staff who is “up to bat” next. Foster parents can see where they are in the rotation, and make adjustments if they are going out of town or just need a little more rest “in the dugout” before taking on a new ball of kitten energy.

The shelter evaluated its staffing for intake procedures, allowing enough time for a thorough evaluation of kittens—including all the procedures necessary prior to foster placement. It recognized that intake capacity is crucial. If this initial critical flow-through point has inadequate capacity, then kittens would never even be able to get on the pathway.

The shelter also evaluated its capacity for spays and neuters, to be sure it would have adequate opportunity to provide surgery for foster kittens promptly when they returned from foster care. Shelter staff evaluated housing space in the adoptions area, to be sure returning kittens wouldn't wait “in the back” for space to become available. The shelter even reorganized its surgery schedule to allow for more Friday surgeries, to coincide with higher weekend adoption rates for kittens.

The volunteer-driven foster kitten delivery service is still on the ARL's goal sheet. It had been planned in case foster pickup in Boston's after-work rush hour was causing delays—but so far, kitten pickup hasn't been much of a problem, so the league has that element “on deck” itself for now!

Through careful planning, lifesaving capacity is maximized. Length of stay for kittens is minimized to what is only absolutely necessary, both in the shelter and in foster homes. Kittens stay healthy and get the enrichment and socialization they need, and the shelter has more time and space to “go to bat” for everyone else. **AS**

To learn more about the population management strategies ARL-Boston has used, see the ASPCApro webinar from their series on the ASV's Guidelines for Standards of Care in Animal Shelters at tinyurl.com/3tyalng.





ANIMAL SHELTER MEDICAL INTAKE CHECKSHEET

Animal identification #:		Animal Name:	
Date:		Time of intake:	
Stray:	<input type="checkbox"/>	Medical Records?	Your Name:
Owner Surrender:	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Transfer:	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Court Order:	<input type="checkbox"/>		
Other:	<input type="checkbox"/>		
		YES	<input type="checkbox"/>
		NO	<input type="checkbox"/>

BRIEF INTAKE EXAMINATION

Staff Initials:

1. Initiate written and computer examination records
2. Take photo of animal for record
3. Document animal's signalment (species, sex, breed, identifying features)
4. Check for identification
 - Microchip scan
 - Ear tip
 - Tattoo check
 - Collar
 - Tag information: _____
5. Write animal's shelter identification number in permanent marker on paper collar and place on animal
6. Weigh animal and record weight
7. Take temperature, pulse and respiration and record ("TPR")
8. Perform a head to toe full body physical exam and record information

EMERGENCY SIGNS

If any box below has been checked, staff member must directly notify the shelter veterinarian. Initial here and indicate the time at which veterinarian was contacted.

Initials: _____ Time: _____

	Check only if noted		Check only if noted
Temp > 105F		Female trouble delivering	
Temp <97F		Altered consciousness	
Seizures		Swollen abdomen	
Labored breathing		Major wound	
Abnormal gum color		Unable to urinate	
Hit by car		Severe emaciation	
Bleeding or bruising		Severe dehydration	
Broken bone/lameness		Possible abuse	



INFECTIOUS DISEASE SIGNS

If any box below has been checked, staff member must write animal ID# on shelter veterinarian's exam board. Record your initials and time that this has been done.

Initials: _____ Time: _____

	Check only if noted
Eye or nose discharge	
Cough or sneeze	
Conjunctivitis	
Ulcers in mouth/nose	
Enlarged lymph nodes	
Patchy or circular hair loss	
Vomiting	
Diarrhea	

PREVENTIVE CARE

Staff Initials:

1. Vaccines administered per shelter vaccination protocol
2. Oral dewormer administered per shelter parasite protocol
3. Topspot flea and tick product applied per shelter parasite protocol

HOUSING CHOICE

	Check where animal is housed
Healthy hold	
Adoption	
Quarantine	
Isolation	

NOTES: _____

~WASH HAND WITH SOAP AND WATER~