

Case Study

Alley Cat Allies Helps Washington, D.C. Establish Humane Cat Programs Encourages City to Embrace Trap-Neuter-Return

Before 2004, residents of Washington, D.C. who sought assistance with stray and feral cats by calling animal control services often found their calls resulted in the cats being trapped and taken to the shelter to be killed. (In Washington, animal control is contracted out to the privately run Washington Humane Society and overseen by the D.C. Department of Public Health.)

As with the vast majority of outdoor cats across the country, the District's feral cats are healthy, but they are unadoptable, because they are not socialized to people. The city's catch and kill policy for feral cats led to thousands of needless deaths in shelters each year, at considerable cost to taxpayers. Resentment grew among the public, who perceived the city's animal control system as not only cruel but ineffective, as intact cats who evaded capture would breed prolifically and start the cycle all over again.

In the spring of 2004, Alley Cat Allies approached the D.C. Department of Public Health with a proposal to establish a Trap-Neuter-Return pilot program. The goals were to demonstrate to skeptical public health and animal control officials how Trap-Neuter-Return humanely and effectively stabilizes feral cat colonies, and to show that their current policies (catch and kill) were failing. The magnitude of animals being killed each year not only made up a sizeable portion of the millions of dollars spent in D.C. on animal control

and sheltering of animals, but was needless and inhumane. The D. C. Department of Public Health accepted the pilot program—which was funded primarily by Alley Cat Allies—and promoted it to city residents as a partnership between the department, Alley Cat Allies, and other local animal protection organizations.

Under the pilot program, animal control officers and shelter officials referred calls about feral cats to Alley Cat Allies, which then worked with residents and volunteers to humanely trap the cats and bring them to local clinics for subsidized spay/neuter and other veterinary services. As established by Alley Cat Allies' best-practice standards for Trap-Neuter-Return, feral cats brought to the clinic had a small portion of the left ear removed (called an "eartip") to identify them as already neutered and vaccinated. Tame cats and young kittens found in neighborhoods entered foster care provided by volunteers until permanent homes were found. Alley Cat Allies was also responsible for recruiting volunteers and training animal control officers and shelter workers on Trap-Neuter-Return and mediation techniques.

During the first year of the program, Alley Cat Allies fielded over 250 calls from residents seeking help with outdoor cats, and more than 1,400 cats were neutered and vaccinated. In addition to

training and coordinating volunteers, Alley Cat Allies organized community workshops on humane care for outdoor cats, and provided door hangers and leaflets to residents on ways to humanely deter cats from gardens, cars, and the like.

Due in large part to the program's great success, the Washington Humane Society announced in 2006 that it would embrace Trap-Neuter-Return as an effective means of stabilizing the feral cat population in Washington, D.C., and established a monthly subsidized spay/neuter clinic for feral cats. In 2007, Alley Cat Allies and the Washington Humane Society opened the first high-volume spay/neuter clinic in the District of Columbia, which includes a permanent no-cost program for the feral cats of the city.

In 2008, D.C. passed a law that requires the Animal Care and Control Agency to promote the utilization of Trap-Neuter-Return practices to manage the feral cat population, provided that all efforts are made to adopt out a trapped, tamable kitten.



The pilot program was called DC CAT.