

Case Study

Alley Cat Allies Leads Coalition to Support Trap-Neuter-Return in Baltimore

Before Alley Cat Allies and a coalition of humane animal advocates stepped in to help, feral cats in Baltimore were often trapped by animal control and taken to local shelters to be killed. Residents caring for the cats were routinely harassed for their efforts to provide food, water, and veterinary care, and many were misguidedly charged with “abandoning” cats, or exceeding the city’s limits on household pets.

“It simply made no sense,” said Becky Robinson, president of Alley Cat Allies. “These Good Samaritans were being punished for providing a valuable community service out of their own pockets. We knew something had to change.”

In 2007, Alley Cat Allies partnered with the Maryland SPCA, Baltimore Animal Rescue and Care Shelter (BARCS), and the Maryland Feline Society to form the Spay/Neuter Coalition for a Litter-less Baltimore. Under Alley Cat Allies’ leadership, the coalition approached Mayor Sheila Dixon and the Baltimore City Department of Health about revising the ordinance that prevented caregivers from caring for cats and conducting Trap-Neuter-Return.

“After we fully explained the numerous benefits of Trap-Neuter-Return for feral cats, the mayor and health department quickly signed on to support the effort at

the city council meeting,” said Robinson.

Alley Cat Allies led the coalition in drafting and introducing new language for the ordinance that would allow residents to feed and provide shelter for managed colonies, as long as all the cats are neutered and eartipped. Alongside dozens of local caregivers, the coalition testified in support of the new ordinance, which successfully passed the council.

“We were elated, but we knew we had two more major hurdles,” said Robinson. “We needed to help caregivers educate their neighbors about Trap-Neuter-Return so they would understand the objectives of the program, and maybe even sign on to help. And we needed to overcome the entrenched mindset among animal control officers that cats who live outdoors should be trapped and taken away.”

Turning from legislation to education, Alley Cat Allies and the coalition members established a series of monthly, hands-on seminars for caregivers about the best practices of Trap-Neuter-Return and provided them with educational materials, such as door hangers and leaflets, to help them explain the program to neighbors. The coalition also brought in expert veterinarians to teach local practitioners high-volume, low-cost spay/neuter techniques that make Trap-Neuter-Return accessible and affordable

and worked closely with the city’s animal control officers to provide resources and address concerns.

“Alley Cat Allies was a major player during the writing of the ordinance and worked hard to be sure it would really work,” said Peg Nemoff, former president of the Maryland Feline Society.

Thanks to Alley Cat Allies and the coalition, cats live better lives in Charm City today because the new legislation recognizes and supports caregivers in their efforts to humanely care for them. Baltimore is now part of Alley Cat Allies’ Every Kitty-Every City program, which rallies existing community volunteers, local groups, and private shelters to expand existing Trap-Neuter-Return programs or start new ones, as well as expand the availability of low-cost spay and neuter to all of the city’s cats—feral, stray or pet.



JASON PUTSCHE

Now Baltimore legislation protects caregivers and their cats.