

Transforming Shelters to Save More Cats: A Blueprint for Change



This toolkit contains details on positive changes animal shelters can make to save more lives, as well as examples and testimonials from shelters.



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1. A NEED FOR TRANSFORMATION

Nationally, only about 30% of cats who enter shelters have positive outcomes. This is devastating for the cats and is not acceptable. It's also devastating for the people working every day to help them. And it's difficult to make changes when animals keep coming through the door. But change is underway in many communities. Many shelters have found that making certain changes to their day-to-day practices and policies can help decrease intake numbers and increase live releases.

A great first step that can have an immediate impact is adopting a Feral Cat Protection Policy and no longer impounding feral cats.

This policy is based on the fact that although feral cats, also called community cats, are the same species as pet cats, they live outdoors and are not socialized to people. It recognizes that they live full, healthy lives outdoors—and that almost no community cats who enter shelters have positive outcomes, because they are not adoptable.

In this toolkit, we explain how a Feral Cat Protection Policy works and outline other easy-to-implement changes that help you increase your live release rates. For example, many shelters are shifting their focus to organized Trap-Neuter-Return programs for community cats, innovative adoption programs, public education, support for pet owners, resources for compassionate community members who want to help animals, and other efforts that create positive outcomes for animals.

Making Change Happen

Making changes to how your shelter operates—or even considering making changes—can be overwhelming. It can require a drastic shift in thinking after years—or even decades—of operating in a completely different way. We've heard from many shelter employees who say they love cats but struggle with what to do with them when so many come through their doors every day.

Kate Hurley, DVM, Director of the Koret Shelter Medicine Program at UC Davis, says she has loved cats since early childhood. She began her career by working in animal control. The cats she brought into the shelter only had a one in four chance of a positive outcome. "I believed in my bones that that was the best way to serve that cat and my community," says Hurley. "So I did that work, as hard as it was."

Hurley set out to learn more about the shelter system and found that there was a much better way to serve the animals. "Starting a couple of years ago, rereading old research, seeing what was happening in different parts of the country, I came to a kind of troubling conclusion," says Hurley. She determined that many of the assumptions that she and her shelter operated under were actually false, and that admitting healthy community cats to shelters was not serving the shelter's goals.

Many shelters are coming to similar conclusions and working to change the way they operate. There's a network of shelter staff who have gone down this path before and are willing to help. The new approach won't be perfect—there will be bumps and hurdles. But the goal is to continue adjusting and improving as you advance your shelter's policies and programs.

Alley Cat Allies is available to assist you and to answer any questions you may have as you consider adopting new policies and programs.



Lives Saved in Albuquerque

The Albuquerque Animal Welfare Department implemented a large-scale Trap-Neuter-Return program in early 2012. The city started covering the cost of spay and neuter surgeries for community cats brought to clinics. The city's program includes a TNR trap loan program, resources and advice for community cat caregivers, mapping of hundreds of community cat colonies, and a partnership with local activists to scrutinize cat intake records to identify any cats who might have come from a known colony. This community-oriented program works wonders for cats. Within the first year of conducting TNR, 59% fewer cats were killed in the shelter than in the previous 12 months.

"At the time, the city was killing several thousand street cats each year but there was no evidence it was a successful method of controlling the street-cat population," said department employee Jim Ludwick in an article in PETroglyphs. "It was adding to crowding in our catteries, at a time when crowding was a major contributing factor in the suffering and death of domestic, adoptable housecats at the shelters."

Best Friends Animal Society helped form and support this unique partnership in Albuquerque to make TNR possible. PetSmart Charities awarded Best Friends Animal Society a \$700,000 grant to support the initiative.

2. A NEW APPROACH FOR CATS

We have heard from many animal shelters that want a model that helps prevent overcrowding and the associated health and emotional issues for animals, and also helps the shelter save money. Many people assume that increasing adoptions is the only way to increase live outcome rates. But statistics show that live outcome rates can actually decrease despite increased cat adoptions.¹ This is likely because many of the cats entering the shelters are community cats.

Community cats are not socialized to humans and do not want to live in homes. They are unadoptable, but many shelters still take them in even though there is no possibility for a good outcome for them in the traditional shelter setting. This approach is inhumane and ineffective, as it fails to permanently reduce outdoor cat populations because of the vacuum effect. When cats are removed, the remaining cats breed to capacity, and other cats move in to take advantage of the available resources.

Adopting a Feral Cat Protection Policy is the best way to quickly lower your intake numbers—and it can actually help you increase your adoption rate.

Benefits of a Feral Cat Protection Policy

When shelters stop accepting community cats, they see almost immediate benefits—intake numbers decrease, save rates increase, and community support increases.

This approach frees up critical staff time and saves money, allowing shelters to focus more on increasing adoption rates, improving shelter conditions, and implementing Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR) in the community.

This approach can also dramatically improve staff morale. The Humane League of Lancaster County in Pennsylvania had a high volume of community cat intakes and ended up spending a significant amount of its time and resources killing community cats. This was demoralizing for the shelter staff, and CEO Joan Brown realized that it was not fulfilling the shelter's mission of animal protection.

"I finally went to the board and said, 'Where in our mission statement does it say euthanize [healthy animals]?'” says Brown.

In 2008, The Humane League made the decision to change as an organization. It would no longer accept feral cats. Instead, it now

embraces TNR as the logical and humane approach that supports its mission. "Not only has it made a difference in the shelter environment, but it has allowed us to be far more positive, happy and hopeful in our work," says Brown.

In the rest of this toolkit, we will outline how to adopt a Feral Cat Protection Policy, as well as the subsequent steps your shelter can consider taking to increase save rates for cats.

New Approach to Adoptable Cats

Many shelters are changing their approach to socialized cats as well. To decrease the number of cats with negative outcomes in your shelter, you may consider only impounding the number of healthy cats that you can adopt out. It may seem counterintuitive, but there are alternatives to shelters. Instead of accepting every healthy cat who comes through your door, you can empower citizens to resolve issues that may make them want to relinquish the cat, and share resources to help them keep the cat until there is space at the shelter, find the cat's owner, find a new home for the cat, or look for a rescue organization that may be able to help. In many cases, it is actually better for cats to stay where they are instead of coming to a shelter. According to Barbara Carr, Director of Erie SPCA in Pennsylvania, cats who were waitlisted when the shelter was full had far more live outcomes than cats admitted to the shelter. Of those not taken in, 45% were rehomed 14% were kept by their caregivers, and about 6% were taken to a rescue group.²

Furthermore, when it comes to cats who are lost, statistics show that lost cats are more than 13 times more likely to be reunited with their owners through non-shelter means than through a shelter. More than 60% of cats who are lost return home on their own.³

3. THREE STAGES OF TRANSFORMING YOUR SHELTER

There are many policies and programs your shelter can consider implementing to save more cats' lives. But you don't have to do it all at once. We've broken up our recommendations for feline-friendly shelter practices into three stages.

These three stages provide an overview of some of the fundamental steps shelters can take to bring about change for cats in their community, but this is not meant to be a comprehensive, one-size-fits-all toolkit that will work for all shelters. Alley Cat Allies appreciates that all shelters have different capacities, and we are sharing examples of what has worked well for some shelters.

In the first stage, you can adopt relatively easy-to-implement, low-cost practices that can make a significant impact on your shelter's save rates. After you've made some or all of those changes, you can move on to stage two where you'll increase your shelter's lifesaving capacity by making additional changes that are somewhat more resource-intensive. In stage three, we've provided additional programs and practices that are ideal but that require more staff time, money, and commitment than the previous stages. You may find that the order of these steps won't work in your shelter and that you can instead adopt a few practices from each stage right away. That's fine, of course! Even if you can only adopt one of these practices right now, that one practice might end up saving hundreds—or thousands—of cats' lives.

Stage One: Take Simple Steps to Save More Cats

1. Adopt a Feral Cat Protection Policy

The best thing you can do right now to save cats' lives is to adopt a Feral Cat Protection Policy. A Feral Cat Protection Policy explains that your shelter will no longer impound unsocialized community cats from the public.

A Feral Cat Protection Policy can be as simple as:

As of [Date], [Name of shelter] no longer impounds healthy feral cats brought to the shelter and no longer traps healthy feral cats for impoundment. Feral cats are not socialized to people and are therefore not adoptable. Instead of impoundment, [Name of shelter] now promotes Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR) for feral cats. Through TNR, feral cats are humanely trapped, vaccinated and spayed/neutered by a veterinarian, eartipped for identification, and returned to their outdoor home.

Once you've written and decided on a Feral Cat Protection Policy, you'll want to announce this new approach to your community so that residents understand how it works and why your shelter has this new policy. Alley Cat Allies recommends posting your policy on your shelter's website, on a bulletin board in the shelter, and on other communications materials. You can also send out a press release announcing this policy change.

Instead of impounding community cats, you can re-route them to TNR programs where they are neutered, vaccinated, eartipped for identification, and returned to their outdoor home. Although it may not be obvious, community cats are actually not homeless. Community cats are domestic animals, but just like the squirrels, chipmunks, and sparrows we see every day, their home is outdoors. TNR is humane, and it effectively stabilizes outdoor cat colonies. We will explain TNR and how to implement it in Stage Two.

2. Stop Trapping Community Cats for Impoundment

Make sure that your staff knows to never trap community cats. If your shelter is associated with your city's animal control, be sure that all animal control officers are aware that they should no longer trap community cats, unless they are trapping them as part of a humane Trap-Neuter-Return program. Explain your new Feral Cat Protection Policy and why it is the best approach to feral cats.

3. Stop Loaning Traps for Trap and Removal

As part of your new Feral Cat Protection Policy, end the practice of loaning out traps for trap and removal of community cats. If you loan traps out to community members, ensure that they are using the traps as part of a humane Trap-Neuter-Return program, and explain why your shelter no longer accepts community cats.



A Tremendous Shift

Chico Animal Services in Chico, California, has made a huge change in its approach to cats. It stopped accepting all healthy cats—whether they are unsocialized or socialized—on February 1, 2013. “Obviously, bringing them here is not in their best interest,” said Tracy Mohr, the manager of Chico Animal Services, in a Chico Enterprise-Record story. “If they are more likely to go home or more likely to get adopted out there, we don't have any business bringing them to the shelter.”

The shelter now encourages community members to conduct TNR and helps residents locate traps. They refer any owner-surrendered cats to a private shelter where they are more likely to be adopted.

“There has been a tremendous shift among the welfare community on how to handle cats...What works great for dogs does not work for cats,” Mohr says. “Ending the intake of healthy [community] cats will significantly free up resources and energy and allow the shelter to focus on cats that really need the help.”

4. Recognize Eartipping of Community Cats

An eartip means the cat has been spayed or neutered, vaccinated, and is part of a community cat colony. Eartipping is an effective and universally accepted method to identify a spayed or neutered and vaccinated feral cat. It is the removal of the distal one-quarter of a cat's left ear, which is approximately 3/8 inch, or 1 cm, in an adult and proportionally smaller in a kitten.

Make sure your staff knows to never trap eartipped cats. If they are mistakenly picked up, return them immediately to their original location.

Learn more about eartipping at www.alleycat.org/Eartip.

5. Support Trap-Neuter-Return for Community Cats

Shelter protocol for community cats can focus on TNR. Those cats can be spayed/neutered, vaccinated, eartipped for identification, and then returned to their outdoor home. Maintaining excellent records, detailing the location the cats originally came from, will make it easier to return the cats—and track your program's success. If your facility cannot start a program right away, consider partnering with local community cat groups who can help with referrals in the interim and work on making small steps toward the larger goal.

Read more about why TNR is the best approach for community cats and how to implement it in your community at www.alleycat.org/TNR.

6. Make Connections

Reaching out to your community can help ensure that community members understand your shelter's new approach to community cats—and are willing to get involved to make sure it's successful.

- **Build partnerships** with other animal protection organizations in your area, including private rescues, breed-specific rescues, TNR groups, and other shelters. Also, reach out to the veterinary community to find clinics willing to spay/neuter community cats (you may even be able to negotiate a lower rate for community cats). You can include a list of these partner animal organizations on your website and in your shelter, and work together with these groups with the goal of saving more animals' lives.
- **Provide resources for community members** who are working to protect animals. This can include educational resources, meeting space for TNR and rescue groups, a low-cost spay/neuter clinic, and a trap loan program for individuals and groups conducting TNR.
- **Launch a help line.** Have a dedicated phone number or email address, or both, for answering the public's questions about caring for outdoor cats and TNR, and any other questions they may have. Work with local groups to triage calls to meet the needs of the caller. Nevada Humane Society instituted an Animal Help Desk at the shelter to provide free advice and assistance to the public about everything from TNR for feral cats to alternatives to surrendering a pet.
- **Ask people questions** to better understand their issues so that you can provide solutions that are best for the person and for animals. For example, you may learn that they want



Fewer Kittens, Lower Animal Control Costs

San Jose Animal Care and Services in California ditched the trap and remove method in favor of TNR in 2010. Director John Cicirelli says his department is focusing on “reducing the number of cats being born in the community, which will reduce the number of cats in the shelter and the number of [calls] we must respond to.”

Cicirelli's department spays and neuters all healthy feral cats who are brought to the shelter and then returns them to their neighborhoods. They educate the residents in these neighborhoods about feral cats and how they can get involved with efforts to help them.

As a result of the program, Cicirelli and his team reduced cat and kitten shelter intake by 25% by July 2012.⁴

to surrender their cat because of a behavioral issue that you can easily help them with or that all they need is humane deterrents or repellents to keep community cats from entering their garden.

- **When people call about community cats, connect them** with your own or community resources that can help them help the cats, and make sure they are familiar with TNR. You can let them know about Alley Cat Allies' Feral Friends Network, a network used to connect local groups and individuals practicing TNR with people in their area looking for help. Learn more at www.alleycat.org/FeralFriends.

7. Educate, Educate, Educate

Educate the public—and your own staff—about outdoor cats.

- Educate the public about your programs and other local resources for stray and community cats such as low-cost or subsidized spay and neuter clinics and TNR programs. Provide information about community cats at the front desk of your shelter and at all adoption events—even dog events! Consider using our brochures, posters, and other educational tools on community cats and TNR. Go to www.alleycat.org/Shop.
- When you make the transition and stop accepting community cats, make sure community members understand why you are making this change and that it will actually help protect the cats and will help save the lives of other animals.
- Host a public information and TNR workshop to introduce the new approach and drum up volunteer support. You can get all you need to start your workshop here: www.alleycat.org/Workshop.
- When needed, let community members know about humane deterrents to keep cats away from places they are not welcome. Learn more about how to deter cats from areas where they are not wanted at www.alleycat.org/Deterrents.
- Purchase brochures to distribute to callers, visitors in your facility, and in neighborhoods where officers are working at www.alleycat.org/Shop.

- Become an educational resource center for your community. Transform your website, bulletin boards, and events into educational opportunities.
- Train shelter employees to better understand the public's and the cats' needs, and provide tools and counseling to address common issues.

8. Spay/Neuter All Animals Before They Leave Your Facility

Spay/neuter all animals before they leave your facility for adoption, are transferred to another facility or private rescue group, or for your shelter's foster homes if they're old enough. This reduces the number of kittens born each year and sends a message to the public that you are socially responsible and care about the lives of animals. Voucher and other post-adoption spay/neuter programs alone are not effective enough: they have a low rate of compliance and they require resources to maintain.

This includes spaying and neutering kittens before adoption or foster. Early-age spay/neuter (kittens are sterilized at eight weeks, or as soon as they weigh two pounds) before adoption is a safe and successful way to ensure that 100% of animals leaving your facility are sterilized. Learn more about early-age spay and neuter at www.alleycat.org/EarlyAge.

Early-age spay/neuter and spay/neuter before adoption practices are a good investment: implementing these programs means you can stop spending resources on follow-up to sterilization compliance, paperwork, and caring for the "oops" litters from adopted cats.

9. Institute Programs that Reduce Owner Surrender

Provide community members with more options than bringing their companion animal to your facility. Some services you can offer include: website and in-shelter bulletin board posting services, maintaining a list of pet-friendly apartment buildings, providing tips and ideas about getting a companion animal adopted successfully, and invitations to join adoption events. To improve animal retention, consider implementing programs such as low-cost medical services and behavior training. You can also start a pet food bank for people who are not able to afford pet food.

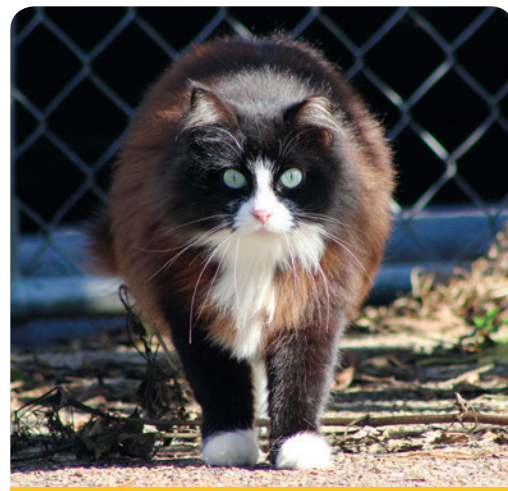
Stage Two: Make Additional Changes to Help Even More Cats

1. Keep Accurate and Detailed Records

When shelters track the number of animals entering the facility and how they leave (returned to owner, adopted, etc.), they have a clear picture of how they are improving, can assess the effectiveness of their programs over time, and can keep track of how their resources are being allocated. It is beneficial for records to include specific categories of cats (stray, feral, socialized, etc.) and to also document the animal's original location; who brought her to the shelter and why; and the animal's outcome, including adoption, transfer, or death. For any death, list the reason for death. It is also beneficial to track the number, type, and result of calls you receive from the public.

Accurate and detailed records can help your shelter in a number of ways:

- **They provide immediate information about where and how resources are being used** to help identify needs and evaluate the success or failure of programs. You can analyze the effectiveness of your life-saving programs and determine whether the amount of money spent on spay/neuter impacts the number of animals brought into the shelter.
- **They can help you identify high-impact areas and neighborhoods** for Trap-Neuter-Return and other efforts. You can see which zip codes, neighborhoods, and other areas the most cats—and phone calls—are coming in from.
- **They can help you make the case to potential donors, foundations, or partners** on why they should support your shelter's work. People want to know exactly how their money will be used, and will be more likely to donate if they can see that your shelter is making improvements over time.



Feral Freedom in Jacksonville, Florida

Jacksonville is home to the very successful Feral Freedom program, a program of First Coast No More Homeless Pets. Feral Freedom is a public-private partnership promoting TNR that started in 2008.

When community cats are brought into Jacksonville's shelter, they are sterilized and returned to their outdoor homes. The program is funded entirely by private donations and animal advocacy organizations. Close to 20,000 community cats have been sterilized, vaccinated, and eartipped through the Feral Freedom program since 2008.

Data confirms the success of this partnership. Jacksonville Animal Control and Protective Services estimates that Feral Freedom has saved the city well over one million dollars in just over four years. In the program's first year, negative outcomes for adult cats decreased nearly 60%.⁵

Since the shelter stopped taking in community cats, adoption rates of socialized cats has increased dramatically, according to Scott Trebatoski, Chief of Animal Control and Protective Services in Jacksonville. Since 2007, the number of adoptable cats who are either adopted or transferred to a rescue organization has increased 322%. That's right—322%!

"This is one of the most positive and unexpected benefits of TNR," says Trebatoski.

- **They build public support.** Being transparent about your shelter's new programs to protect and improve more lives, and then sharing the change in your statistics as you implement those programs, ultimately improves relations with the community. People want to help where they know they are saving lives. Being open with them will build community-wide confidence. It is important to get buy-in from your constituents, and transparency is a good public relations move to promote your humane programs.

2. Implement a Shelter-Sponsored TNR Program

TNR is the only humane and effective method of care for community cats. Shelters that start TNR programs can see dramatic results in a relatively short time period. They tend to see significant reductions in kitten and cat intakes, and then increases in their save rates.

Richmond SPCA started a TNR program in 2004. Volunteers humanely trap community cats and bring them to Richmond SPCA's spay/neuter clinic where they are sterilized free of charge.

"Feral cats are remarkably good at taking care of themselves," says Richmond SPCA CEO Robin Starr, who implemented the shelter's TNR program and many other lifesaving initiatives. "With time, patience and support of TNR programs, we can prevent the continued growth of these colonies and keep the cats healthy and well cared for by dedicated volunteers. Feral cats do us no harm, and they deserve to live out their lives peacefully in the only environment they've ever known."

Learn how to implement an organizational TNR program at www.alleycat.org/OrganizationalTNR.

You and your staff can learn how to conduct TNR through Alley Cat Allies' free webinars at www.alleycat.org/Webinar.

Learn how to practice targeted TNR, which involves identifying which areas or neighborhoods have the most people calling about cats or bringing in cats, and then targeting TNR efforts in those areas at www.alleycat.org/TargetedTrapping.

3. Purchase Traps to Loan to the Public for TNR

Consider charging a refundable deposit to ensure that traps are returned. Learn how to use the traps and become familiar with trapping techniques. Include information about how to trap community cats (www.alleycat.org/TNR) with each trap, and always make sure people borrowing traps sign an agreement stating that the traps will be used only for the purpose of TNR of outdoor cats. Show borrowers how to set the traps before they leave your facility. HOPE Animal Shelter in Tucson, Arizona, the Sacramento SPCA, and BARC in Houston are just a few of the many shelters that run trap loan programs. Review our guide to starting a trap depot at www.alleycat.org/TrapDepot.

4. Strengthen and Expand Your Adoption Programs and Foster Network

Having creative and innovative adoption programs and a large and diverse foster network can make a huge difference in animals' lives. Here are some approaches we've seen at shelters around the country that are committed to improving their save rates:

- Keep adoption hours during weekends and evening hours to improve shelter visitation rates. Increase off-site adoption events.
- Improve the access of animal rescue and breed-specific rescue groups to your shelter by building partnerships and creating outreach protocols. The City of Chicago's Animal Care and Control partners with 230 rescue groups!
- Increase the number of homes available for fostering the animals that enter your shelter. Make sure your community knows you need foster homes by posting on social media, posting flyers in community centers and stores, and by sending out a press release. Call local veterinary offices and ask whether any staff members are interested in fostering. Host regular orientation sessions at your shelter or a local library for potential foster volunteers. Ask current foster volunteers to speak about their experiences at the event. Feature foster volunteers in newsletters and on social media to show appreciation and create a sense of community within the shelter volunteer network.



More Transparency = More Adoptions

Manatee County Animal Service in Florida wanted to increase the number of animals adopted—and decrease the number of negative outcomes—in its shelter. The shelter started listing on its website the date when a particular animal may be killed, as well as charts detailing the number of animals impounded and whether they ended up being adopted, returned to owners, transferred, or killed. Manatee County is now seen as a state model for shelter transparency.

In April 2013, the Florida legislature passed a bill that requires all state animal pounds and shelters to release monthly reports about how many animals they take in and what happens to them. The bill was based on Manatee County's practices and success.

"When they start doing it [referring to the Florida bill], they'll see that their numbers of live release rate are going to increase, their save rates are going to increase because they're going to have that awareness out in the public," said Tammy Bentley, a Manatee County shelter employee, in a story on ABC affiliate WWSB.

Stage Three: Become a Model Shelter for Cats

1. Provide Spay/Neuter to the Public

Open a spay/neuter clinic for low-cost or subsidized spay and neuter services. Offering these services to the public shows your commitment to the community and animals—and will ultimately reduce your shelter's intakes and increase your save rates.

Learn more about high-volume, high-quality, low-cost spay/neuter models and veterinarian training in these methods at www.humanealliance.org.

Find out more about unique veterinary protocols for community cats at www.alleycat.org/Veterinarian.

2. Conduct Community Outreach in Underserved Communities

Develop strategies and programs to bring critical information and services to areas where many people cannot afford or access veterinary care and other resources that support pet wellness. You might invite your volunteers to assist you with going door-to-door in certain areas and offering information on spay/neuter services and other low-cost veterinary services. If possible, hand out certificates for free spay/neuter surgeries and vaccinations. Even better, launch a mobile spay/neuter initiative and literally bring free veterinary services into low-income areas.

Increase your impact with targeted outreach. If you are tracking where animals brought into your shelter are coming from—and where you're receiving the most calls from—you can identify which neighborhoods and zip codes to spend the most time in.

3. Make the Case to Local Officials

Work with local officials to ensure that your community's laws and policies help save animals' lives—and voice your opposition to proposed or existing policies that make it harder for shelters and others to save animals' lives.

- **Review local laws and policies that may affect community cats.** If people conducting TNR in your community are not facing any legal issues or harassment, then you likely do not need to push for a law supporting TNR, and a law could actually complicate things and make it harder to implement widespread TNR in your community. However, if TNR groups are being harassed for their efforts to help community cats, that's when it's time to push for a simple, straightforward law supporting TNR. The number of local governments across the country with ordinances favoring TNR for outdoor cats has risen exponentially over the past decade, from just 24 in 2003 to 240 in 2013. That's a tenfold increase in just one decade! Nationally, more than 330 local governments have embraced TNR as their official approach to animal control for community cats. Explain the benefits of TNR and have a detailed proposal ready to outline how a TNR ordinance would help improve your community. Find suggestions for language and sample provisions for TNR ordinances in our Law & Policy Brief "Trap-Neuter-Return Ordinances and Policies in the United States" at www.alleycat.org/Publications.
- **Provide animal control officers and supervisors with supporting evidence** showing how this new approach to outdoor cats is working for other shelters at www.alleycat.org/CaseforTNR.
- **Remind officials that saving animals' lives generates positive media and community support.** Americans love cats and do not want to see them die in shelters. More than 80% of Americans believe that leaving a stray cat outside to live out his life is more humane than having the cat killed, according to a national survey conducted for Alley Cat Allies by Harris Interactive. As you know, people feel much more comfortable supporting a shelter that is doing all it can to save lives.
- **Make sure that animal control officers and officials understand that the concerns citizens have about cats will still be addressed.** Explain that the issues residents have will be remedied through TNR instead of through killing the cats. Emphasize that TNR ends mating behaviors such as yowling and fighting, in addition to ending the breeding cycle and stabilizing the population.
- **Voice your opposition to counter-productive animal control laws** that force more animals into shelters, create barriers to TNR and other humane approaches, and overtax shelters by monopolizing resources and staff time. Laws and ordinances that mandate spay and neuter or cat licensing do not work. They only penalize owners and caregivers and increase the number of animals killed. Bans on feeding stray and community cats and requirements for community cat colony care unjustly single out caregivers. Learn more about ordinances: www.alleycat.org/Ordinances.



A Model City for Cats

In Chicago, a coalition of animal shelters and rescue groups works together toward the mutual goal of humanely stabilizing community cat populations. Since the program began in 2008, more than 17,500 community cats have been sterilized through Trap-Neuter-Return in Cook County, which includes Chicago, and the effort has been financed by private groups. The coalition collaborates to offer spay/neuter and other veterinary services, public education, trap lending, hands-on trapping help, transportation services, recovery space, food, and assistance with rehoming cats. The results of this proactive approach have been impressive. One of Chicago's TNR groups, Tree House Humane Society, started targeted TNR projects in 2011 in two zip codes. The number of community cats brought to animal control from those areas already has been reduced by 30-40%. The original population of the colonies has shrunk by 23% through adoptions, and the community has become much more involved in caring for the cats.

4. Start a Neonatal Kitten Care Program

When unweaned kittens show up at animal control shelters, these babies who require around-the-clock care are almost always killed. But some shelters are starting life-saving programs to protect these extremely fragile and vulnerable animals. Neonatal kitten care programs rely heavily on devoted volunteers and foster homes to care for the animals. Volunteers are trained in neonatal kitten care and generally given the supplies they need to bottle-feed and care for the kittens until they reach the appropriate age for adoption. Some programs are housed at the shelter itself, with visiting volunteer “nurses” who take shifts with the kittens. This approach avoids the daily grind of neonatal kitten care, which can drain shelter staff’s energy.



Austin Pets Alive! in Austin, Texas, developed an innovative neonatal program that is saving kittens’ lives. Austin Pets Alive! Executive Director Ellen Jefferson, DVM, and her staff visited the city shelter often to determine how to focus their lifesaving efforts most effectively. “One thing I was really struck by is that out of 10,000 animals that were being euthanized or killed, 1,200 of those were orphaned kittens,” she says.

Austin Pets Alive! started having their volunteers pick up kittens as soon as they were dropped off at the city shelter. They were then housed in a dedicated neonatal ward where caregivers signed up for two-to-four hour feeding shifts to ease the burden of 24-hour kitten care. In 2012, the program rescued almost 1,200 kittens.

Whenever kittens arrive at your shelter, be sure to try to also get the mother, whether that means trapping her if she’s a community cat, or asking the person who brought the kittens in if they can also bring the mother in. Learn more about what to do in various scenarios in which you may be trying to trap a mother: www.alleycat.org/MomandKittens.

San Antonio Pets Alive! and Best Friends Animal Society Los Angeles are two more examples of neonatal kitten care programs.

5. Start a Ringworm Program

Many cats lose their lives at shelters just because they have ringworm, which is similar to athlete’s foot. Ringworm is highly treatable, and does not have to be a death sentence for cats in shelters. Some shelters have opened ringworm wards where cats with ringworm are cared for and treated. They are moved into the general cat area once they are successfully treated and their infection clears up.

Austin Pets Alive! opened a ringworm ward in 2010 and has already saved more than 200 cats just through this simple program. Their innovative program allows cats to be adopted directly from the ringworm ward so that they can be treated at home with their new family instead of staying at the shelter longer for treatment. They also have a Facebook page for the ringworm ward so that people can get to know the cats.

Nevada Humane Society also has a ringworm program. When the shelter’s former director Bonney Brown began her work there in 2007, she immediately instituted many policy and program changes to increase the shelter’s lifesaving capacity. One change she made was to end the automatic killing of animals for ringworm and other treatable conditions. The shelter depends on foster homes to help care for cats and kittens with ringworm until they are symptom-free and ready for adoption. Since it can be challenging to find foster homes willing to care for animals with ringworm, they make sure to educate people about exactly what ringworm is, how to treat it, and what simple precautions to take when caring for an animal with ringworm.

For more information, visit www.alleycat.org/Shelters.

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