



## **Concerns with Austin Animal Center's Shelter Neuter Return (SNR) Program for Cats and Kittens**

**Presented by Cat Champions of Austin, Texas  
December 9, 2019**

## **Executive Summary**

Cat Champions of Austin, Texas is a group comprised of Austin Animal Center (AAC) volunteers and citizens of Austin and Travis County concerned about AAC's Shelter Neuter Return (SNR) Program. We are presenting this packet to the Animal Advisory Commission to document our concerns about the SNR program. We believe the SNR program needs improvements to increase the humane treatment of cats in Austin. Therefore, we present the following to the Commission:

1. History of SNR in Austin and examples of cats and kittens that were failed by the program
2. Request to remove non-feral kittens under 6 months from the SNR program, including a request to amend the current city code, and the reasons for this request
3. Ideas for how to reduce the cat population at AAC and to show that removing kittens from the SNR program will not place an undue burden on AAC
4. Other points of view on SNR programs (also referred to as Return to Field)

Cat Champions of Austin, Texas realizes that making improvements to the SNR program will require more than speeches and packets. Therefore, we respectfully request that an Animal Advisory Commission Working Group be created to address necessary improvements to the SNR program more fully, and that members of our group be allowed to participate in the Working Group.

December 9, 2019

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# Tab 1

## Priority List of Animal Services Implementation Plan Recommendations

	Recommendation	Additional Cost	Timeline	Status
13	<b>Feral Kitten Foster Program</b> Develop a program to provide foster, socialization, spay/neuter and adoption of underage kittens trapped in colonies. Recommend funding the operations costs and provide space for the program in the Davenport Adoption Center when operational. (See recommendation 2.)	\$52,230	FY12	This item will be a budget consideration for the FY12 budget process
14	<b>Stray Cat Relocation</b> Relocate stray cats back in to the community from where they came, after spaying or neutering them. The City will work with community stakeholders to develop related procedures and protocols to address this item.	\$78,447	FY11	Start meetings with neighborhood associations, community groups, apartment management association, etc. in May.  This item will be a budget consideration for the FY11 budget process.  City Council approved the Proposed Budget with \$78,447 of funding for this item. This should fund medical "make ready" for 1,299 stray cats using volunteer corps for relocation and education efforts.  TLAC staff coordinated two meetings with community stakeholders to discuss possible implementation of the successful TNR model as practiced in Jacksonville, Florida. Meeting participants included Animal Advisory Commission, Humane Society, Animal Trustees of Austin, Austin Pets Alive!, and Emancipet. It was decided that the Humane Society will lead this program.

## Priority List of Animal Services Implementation Plan Recommendations

	Recommendation	Additional Cost	Timeline	Status
				<p>AHS is finalizing cage space details, program flyer and door hanger. TLAC is finalizing criteria selection for feral cat candidates. AHS and TLAC staff will be visiting Jacksonville, FL January 10-12 for 2.5 days to observe the Feral Freedom program protocols in action, with sites visits and ride-alongs to First Coast No More Homeless Pets (FCNMHP) and the City of Jacksonville Animal Care and Protective Services (JACPS)</p> <p>TLAC began transferring feral cats to AHS for spay &amp; neuter and vaccination, and return to the field.</p>
15	<p><b>Public Awareness Campaign</b></p> <p>Organize a volunteer public relations task force that focuses on promoting shelter needs. The City of Austin, with task force/public input, will also create and implement a seasonal public awareness campaign that focuses on key Animal Services programs.</p>	<p>Advertising: \$45,000</p> <p>Printing: \$8,000</p>	FY11	<p>Task force meeting scheduled for 4/15/10. Implementing cost neutral elements of the plan immediately.</p> <p>Immediate focus on owner relinquishments. Another meeting was held on May 20.</p> <p>The public awareness group met July 29<sup>th</sup>. The group decided to consider themselves a committee rather than a task force. The members believe that their mission is ongoing rather than task-specific. Two members, Dolly Ensey and Adette Quintana, volunteered to serve as co-chairs for the committee and as liaisons with staff. The group discussed an assortment of ideas for promoting shelter activities and events and there was also great interest in</p>

## November 2015 Animal Services Report

### Austin Animal Center

#### Animal Center News

- The live release rate of animals was 97.5%.
- The number of animals in shelter custody on December 12 was 940. The number of animals in the shelter was 421 and the number of dogs at Town Lake Animal Center was 51.
- More than 1,000 staff dog walks occurred.
- Dogs Out Loud is raising money to purchase treat buckets for the front of all the dog kennels. These will be installed on the front of each kennel with instructions to 'give treats for good behavior.' They are also getting Christmas trees donated for the lobby and are holding a stocking stuffer event.
- Dogs Out Loud has resumed their program of working with specific dogs housed at AAC.
- Dr. Amy Marder, former director of the Center for Shelter Dogs and Bernice Clifford, director of behavior and training for Animal Farm Foundation, came to Austin to audit animal care, enrichment and adoption procedures. Volunteers and staff members were invited to participate in question and answer sessions and they made a series of recommendations. Among key recommendations are:
  - *Make Austin Animal Center more of a resource/community center and less of a routine shelter – dog training classes, lectures for the public, behavior helpline for adopters, behavioral services for adopters up to six months after adoption.*
  - *Set up programs to reduce intake – eliminate or significantly reduce reclaim fees (currently unaltered animal reclaim fee is double the adoption fee).*
  - *Standardize and streamline intake procedures so animals get evaluated medically and behaviorally upon intake allowing, healthy, friendly animals to be fast-tracked to adoption.*
  - *Facilitate adoptions. Conduct pre and post adoption counseling. Have staff in each kennel area to assist adopters. Have information about available pets on kennel cards. Separate animals by availability. Co-house more dogs. Improve adoption process.*
  - *Restructure volunteer program. Establish volunteer levels based on skill level and experience, use dot system to categorize dogs, eliminate public dog walking program and instead build volunteer capacity.*
  - *Change animal care/behavior. Eliminate existing 'review' process and replace with daily behavior rounds. Incorporate 'behavior' into daily care so all dogs are either walked or handled daily. Create an enrichment/behavior support program for high risk dogs. All staff should carry treat bags and there should be treat buckets on cages. Build more play yards closer to the kennels.*
  - *Update veterinary program. Allow puppies to be taken from cages for socialization. Train staff and volunteers to use protective clothing (guidelines from Standards of Care in*

- Play groups are currently being conducted once a week. Regular play groups will resume once the behavior and enrichment program manager and the second behavior staff team member are hired. Currently, only one position in the behavior and enrichment department is filled.
- Beginning December 1, all available-for-adoption dogs will be concentrated into the 100 through the front of the 400 kennels and lost and found, stray and otherwise unavailable dogs will be held in the back of the 400 kennels and 500 kennels. Dogs with behavioral challenges that require volunteers and staff have special training to handle will be housed in the back of the 500 kennels, closest to the play yards.
- December 12, shelter leadership staff members are meeting with cat volunteers to plan for turning the center part of the large cat adoption room into a volunteer and staff only enrichment space for cats.

#### **Customer Service – Update on SCRP (stray cat return program)**

- SCRP is a component of the No Kill Implementation Plan to increase live outcomes and has been in place since 2011. It is a partnership program between AAC and the Austin Humane Society.
- Cats in the program must be a minimum of three pounds and three months of age, must have a body condition score of 4/9 or above, cannot have obvious signs of illness or injury, cannot be declawed, and must not have a current ID or traceable microchip and must not have a known history of living primarily indoors. They must have a known physical address for return. Program cats may be transferred to AHS during their stray hold but will remain on the website as stray and will not be released until after stray hold has passed.
- In 2014, 1,035 cats were sent to AHS to be sterilized and returned and 959 were returned. All cats receive a microchip.
- Austin Humane Society has performed 33,795 TNR surgeries and 2,207 surgeries for cats in the SCRP program.
- Relevant statistics: 1 in 50 cats (2%) reclaimed when brought to shelter. 40% of cat owners let their cats outdoors. Read Dr. Hurley's article from Animal Sheltering from 2013: [http://www.animalsheltering.org/resources/magazine/sep\\_oct\\_2013/change-for-community-cats.pdf](http://www.animalsheltering.org/resources/magazine/sep_oct_2013/change-for-community-cats.pdf)

#### **Animal Protection**

- Animal protection officers responded to 2,732 calls, wrote 180 citations and returned 69 animals to the owners in the field.
- Animal protection is in the process of hiring a part time dispatcher.

#### **Media , Marketing and Outreach**



## June 2016 Animal Services Report

### Animal Center News

- The live outcome rate was 96 percent.
- City of Austin Council Member Sherri Gallo presented on June 9 a proclamation recognizing the work and dedication of Austin Animal Services staff.
- Austin Animal Services and Travis County staff met with regional, municipal stakeholders on June 20 to discuss challenges and solutions to issues in the incorporated and unincorporated areas of the County. The group agreed to meet on a quarterly basis, and a closed Facebook page was created for stakeholders to communicate in a timely fashion and to share ideas and solutions.
- An updated stray hold ordinance was adopted by the Austin City Council. The amended ordinance allows pets to be transferred to an approved rescue partner during the stray hold period in order to save the pet's life and also creates a seven-day 'kill hold' period so no animal, stray or surrendered, can be killed for seven days unless that animal is medically suffering. Here is a link to the final, approved ordinance:  
<http://austintexas.gov/edims/document.cfm?id=257526>
- The World Animal Awareness Society visited Austin to film for an upcoming documentary about stray dogs in America.
- The first-ever offsite playgroup adoption event was held at Roscoe Properties. Nine play group rock stars attended, and more events are planned.
- A 'Name Your Adoption Fee' promotion resulted in 123 adoptions over a four-day period, and a 'Fee Waived Cats' promotion resulted in 130 cat and kitten adoptions over a seven-day period.
- The Facebook group 'Austin Lost and Found Pets Page' is an all-volunteer group helping to reunite lost pets with their owners. The page reached 10,000 followers in June and is instrumental in helping to reduce the number of stray animals entering the shelter.
- Two additional play yards, with funding from Animal Farm Foundation, were installed at Austin Animal Center's Levander Loop location.
- The Operations Manager at El Paso Animal Services spent two days in Austin, shadowing staff at Austin Animal Center. El Paso leadership is dedicated to making El Paso a No Kill community.

### Personnel

- The two dog enrichment and exercise specialist positions and the dog volunteer coordinator position have been filled. These positions are two-year, limited term and are funded by a grant from Maddie's Fund.
- Administrative Manager, Chery Henderson, left her position in early July. The position will be advertised as an organization engagement manager.

## § 3-1-25 - DISPOSITION OF AN IMPOUNDED ANIMAL.

- (A) An animal surrendered by its owner to the health authority is immediately abandoned by its owner and is the property of the health authority. The health authority may transfer, place, or sell an animal surrendered by its owner at any time after intake.
- (B) Except as provided in subsection (G), the health authority shall not euthanize an animal before the animal has been impounded for seven business days.
- (C) Except as provided in subsection (D), the health authority shall hold an impounded animal not surrendered by its owner for a period of three business days following impoundment of the animal for owner reclamation. On the fourth business day, an impounded animal is the property of the health authority.
- (D) In order to save the life of an impounded animal not surrendered by its owner, the health authority may transfer that animal to a 26 U.S.C. Section 501(c)(3) ( *Exemption from tax on corporations, certain trusts, etc.* ) organization located in Travis County that is an animal shelter, animal rescue organization, or other animal-welfare organization prior to the expiration of the period described in subsection (C) subject to the following conditions.
  - (1) The health authority shall maintain documentation, in physical and electronic form reviewable by the public, of an animal transferred under this subsection, including a photograph of the animal and all information pertaining to the animal's impoundment and transfer, at the health authority and on the health authority's website for three business days following the impoundment of the animal at the health authority.
  - (2) An animal transferred under this subsection is considered abandoned by its owner, and becomes the property of the transferee organization, upon the expiration of three business days from impoundment by the health authority.
  - (3) Prior to the expiration of the period described in subsection (D)(2), the transferee organization is the designated caretaker of the animal.
  - (4) An animal transferred under this subsection remains subject to reclamation by its owner prior to the expiration of the period described in subsection (D)(2).
- (E) An animal in the custody of the health authority solely for purposes of sterilization, vaccination, or microchipping, is not subject to a mandatory period of impoundment. The health authority is the designated caretaker, but not owner, of such animal during any period of custody.
- (F) The health authority and any 26 U.S.C. Section 501(c)(3) organization that is an animal shelter, animal rescue organization, or other animal-welfare organization to which the health authority has transferred an impounded animal shall not sell or transfer an impounded animal, with or without consideration, to any person, entity, political subdivision, hospital, educational or commercial institution, laboratory, or animal dealer, whether or not such

dealer is licensed by the United States Department of Agriculture or any other state or federal agency, for purposes of medical or biological teaching, research, study, or experimentation of any kind.

- (G) Subsection (A) does not apply to an animal that is irremediably physically suffering, as determined and documented in writing by a veterinarian licensed to practice medicine. An animal is experiencing such suffering if it has a poor or grave prognosis for being able to live without severe, unremitting pain even with prompt, necessary, and comprehensive veterinary care.
- (H) Subsections (A) through (D) do not apply to an animal that is a dangerous animal under Chapter 3-5 ( Dangerous Animals ) of this Code.
- (I) For purposes of calculating time periods in this section, the date of initial impound is not counted.
- (J) Each day the health authority's animal shelter is open to the public for reclamation and adoption is a business day.

Source: Ord. No. 20160623-002, Pt. 1, 7-4-16.

Editor's note— Ord. No. 20160623-002, Pt. 1, effective July 4, 2016, repealed the former § 3-1-25, and enacted a new § 3-1-25 as set out herein. The former § 3-1-25 pertained to reclamation by owner before sale or destruction. See Code Comparative Table for complete history.

## City Council Regular Meeting Transcript – 06/23/2016

Title: ATXN 24/7 Recording

Channel: 6 - ATXN

Recorded On: 6/23/2016 6:00:00 AM

Original Air Date: 6/23/2016

Transcript Generated by SnapStream

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[10:16:34 AM]

>> Mayor Adler: Before we gavel in the meeting, we had the exciting announcement this morning of the internship program with the soldiers from fort hood, have the opportunity to come intern here in the city of Austin and perhaps get job placements, exciting effort. Further, as part of our internship summer program, ctm is hosting 20 summer interns from various high schools across Austin. This program runs through July 15th. If you will please help me welcome these technology students, would you all stand? Technology students?

[Applause] Great. We're happy to have you here. This council meeting will not be the most exciting thing that you see in your stay. You can go ahead and sit down. These folks are going to be visiting and participating on several sites throughout the city, occupational areas that contain stem areas of focus, so either science, technology, engineering, or math-related work. We're excited to have you with us, so thank you. That said, I think we're going to move forward then with the meeting. I'm going to call to order today's meeting. It is Thursday, June 23rd of 2016. Time is 10:18. We are in the city council chambers here at city hall. Let's work our way through the -- through the agenda. Let me read action items.

[10:18:36 AM]

In item number 3, it's approve issuance of a rebate. The word measurable should be measures. On item number 15, the name of the construction company is D, period, I, period, J, period, construction. Items 29 and 50 have been withdrawn. 29 has been withdrawn and item 59 has been withdrawn -- I'm sorry, 29 and 59 have been withdrawn. Item number 55 was recommended by the electric utility commission, vote of 8-0, with commissioners mamud, Norris, and stout absent. Item number 90, there's been a request that we set that to be called no earlier than 4:30. There's been a request that we call item number 92 no earlier than 2:00 P.M. That's items 90 and 92. We are pulling item number 2. Also item number 20. Also item number 56, 57, and 58. Items 73, 74, 75, 76, all pulled to be heard after executive session.

[10:20:43 AM]

And then items 80, 83, and 88. 80, 83. 88 is not in our consent agenda, but all three of those items requested to be heard at 7:00 P.M. Does anyone else want to pull any other items? Yes, Ms. Tovo. Mayor pro tem.

>> Tovo: I have just a quick amendment on item 66. I'd be able to get to it pretty quickly.

>> Mayor Adler: Item number 66? Okay. Any other items to pull? Yes. Ms. Troxclair.

available at the April meeting so people were able to see it?

>> Yes.

>> Houston: Was it posted or was it just --

>> It was posted.

>> Houston: It was posted, so people were able to see the draft agenda -- draft ordinance and respond to that.

>> Yes.

>> Houston: Okay. Okay. So that was my first question, but that's all I have for staff.

>> Good morning.

[10:39:54 AM]

I'm Kristen abbeck, deputy chief animal services officer at Austin animal center. I'm standing in for chief Hammond, who is away on urgent family matter. I'm not an attorney, and Ms. Grace is here today that can answer -- she can answer any legal questions, but I'll give you a little bit of background on why this was necessary, and then just run through what the ordinance means. The -- earlier this year, the Texas supreme court issued a ruling that had potential impacts for all municipalities in Texas. What happened, it was a case in Houston that a stray dog got loose, was picked up by animal patrol for the mandated stray period. At the conclusion of the stray period, following to that, it was transferred to a rescue group. Sometime later the owner of the dog discovered it was with the rescue group, approached the group and said they wanted the dog back. The rescue group declined to return the dog, and so the owner sued the rescue group and won. And so the implication of this is that unless each city has its own local ordinance specifying that ownership after the stray period goes to the city, it calls into question whether or not the city actually owns the animal at the conclusion of the stray period. This -- so this is addressing that, first and foremost, it's making it very clear. Although we had an existing ordinance, this is making it even more clear that now, at the conclusion of the existing three-day stray hold period, the animal does become the custody of the city. And this does not change the stray period. The stray hold period has been three days in Austin for at least the last 15 years and probably longer, and this also codifies some of the existing practices that are a key part of the no-kill implementation plan approved by city council. So now I'll just run very briefly through some of the components of this ordinance.

[10:41:58 AM]

A just addresses that animals that are owners surrendered, when owners are bringing them in and surrendering them, they're not subject to a stray hold period. This was not in the previous code so this is making that very clear. B codifies our current practice of not euthanizing any animal unless it's suffering for a seven-day period. C is -- this is at the core of the Lira case, the case in Houston, this is just making it very clear that at the end of that three-day stray hold period, that the city does own the animal and can transfer it to rescue, it can spay and neuter it or adopt it out. D makes -- so D has led to some questions, and there was an item -- there was a backup item sent to you yesterday that makes it very clear -- and we added some language in the D. What D says is that if it will save an animal's life, we're talking about neonatal kittens and puppies with parvo virus, they can be transferred to a rescue partner during that period. That's because the shelter isn't a 24-hour emergency clinic so it's life-saving for those animals. Approximately 1500 that need round the clock medical care are impacted and their lives are saved by this current existing practice at Austin animal center. So D, we also added language to make it clear that any transfer during that stray hold period will be within Travis county, and that the animals aren't legally transferred, they are sent physically to the rescue partner so that they can live and be taken care of, but they're not the custody of that transfer partner until the conclusion of the stray period. E recognizes that



we do microchip and vaccine clinics, we do rabies clinics in the community, and when we're serving animals that way, they're not subject to a mandatory stray hold period.

[10:43:59 AM]

F is an addition that says that we cannot give any animals to a laboratory to be used for research. And G says that we may euthanize an animal before that seven-day period at any time if that animal is medically suffering with no chance of recovery, or very poor prognosis for recovery. H recognizes that this does not apply to dangerous animals. There's a separate process for that. This does not apply to deemed dangerous animals. I clarifies the time period, and J just defines what we mean by business days. So I'm happy to answer any further questions that you have, and thank you.

>> Mayor Adler: If there are no questions at this point, I'm going to go ahead and call up the speakers. We have speakers -- is Brenda Collier here? Is David King still in the room? You have six minutes if you want that much time.

>> Thank you, city council and mayor. I'm Brenda Collier. I'm a lawyer and a business owner and I'm an animal welfare activist in town. I follow Texas and other court cases involving animals, and I became aware of the Lira case in Texas April 1st when it came out on Twitter feed and immediately became concerned about what that meant to Austin and the city liability for its Austin animal center animals and our rescue animals with our partners. So out of that need arose meetings with community activists like myself and the proposal of the ordinance, and it was posted, it went to the Austin animal commission. I testified in favor of the ordinance at that point, had some input to the ordinance, and I speak today in favor of it. The Texas municipal league recommended that all Texas cities amend their ordinances to be very clear on this point, that after the stray hold is up, the animal is owned by the shelter. That is critical and is an urgent need because after the ruling on April the first, every city is at risk for liability of a lawsuit related to the Lira case.

[10:46:07 AM]

And I will tell you that as an animal lawyer, I have already been called by someone in another city who wants to activate this under -- and that the city of Austin is at risk for these kinds of lawsuits. So this ordinance, when it's passed, will take care of that liability, reduce the liability for the city of Austin and that -- on that point, and that's one of the reasons that it's so urgent. The proposed ordinance really just codifies existing practices, things that have been going on for years in this city. We took the opportunity to clarify a number of points in this ordinance that have been going on, like the ability to transfer the animals to the rescue partners, to Austin pets alive and other rescues during that stray hold period, that if the animals were not sent to they would die. The parvo puppies you've heard about, the bottle babies, babies that the animal center can't care for, and it would risk our no-kill status if we don't have this practice in place. And it's in place, but this ordinance clarifies that. There's been some discussion about changing the three-day hold period to a longer one, lengthening that period would be disastrous for the city. We simply can't afford it, and that's not the practice as I think we've heard, it's been the practice for at least 15 years or longer. Any longer stray hold period would mean the animals might die and we could risk our no-kill status, that's good for animals, that's my heart, but also good for business because we're a no-kill city, and that's great for business for the city of Austin. So you've heard that this was considered at the Austin animal commission, and it was voted on, it was considered, there was testimony, including mine, and it was unanimously approved. And so I would urge you to vote in favor of this ordinance. Thank you.

>> Mayor Adler: Mr. Zimmerman?

>> Zimmerman: Thank you very much for being here. I was hoping we'd have some expertise like yours.



Return to Field - webcast

## Challenges

- Public policy officials
- Veterinary community
- Audubon/Birders
- PETA
- Some public health officials
- Perceived legal issues
- **Publicity can actually hurt**
- 'Our community is different'
- Do not eliminate all rules for owned cats!



Watch later



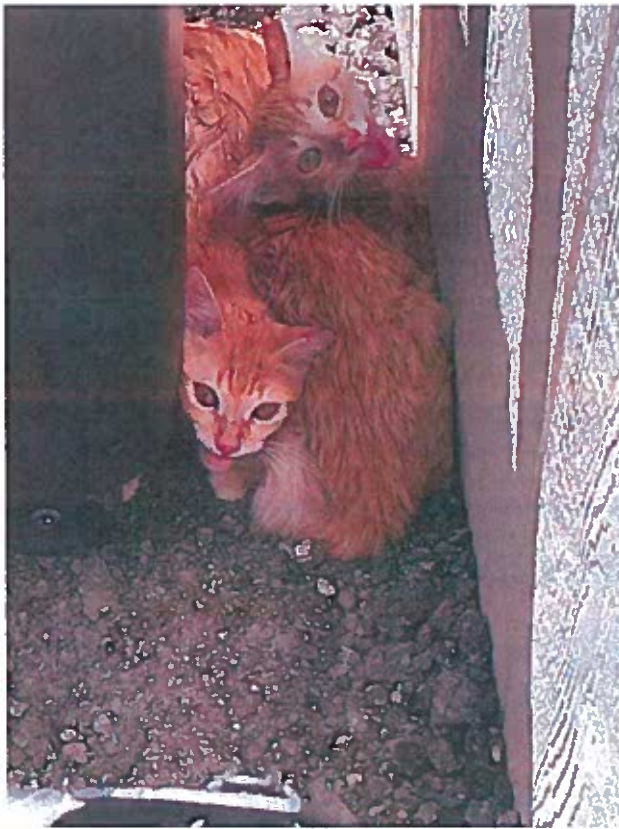
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10:14 / 1:08:05





## **“Facebook” Kittens**

3-month-old kittens sent to SNR the day after arrival. A concerned citizen reported 6 kittens being “dumped” by AHS and reported animal cruelty/abandonment. A Travis County Sheriff was able to find these 2 kittens and returned them to AAC.



Once returned to AAC, these kittens were adopted. It's not known what happened to the other 4 kittens.





## **"Aslan"**

Arrived at AAC with severe leg wounds and a neck wound. Was set to go to SNR after his leg was "healed enough."



He was at AAC for only 11 days before being returned to the streets through SNR. He was brought back to AAC seven weeks later with his leg *still* wounded.



Aslan has now been disqualified for SNR due to his age and multiple missing and broken teeth.



## **“Walgreens” Kitten**

This 4-month-old was brought to AAC and, despite having bloody diarrhea, was sent to SNR. He was to be returned to the Walgreens parking lot at S. Mopac and Slaughter Lane.



## **“Aldo”**

Presenter told AAC she witnessed this cat having seizures in the neighborhood, but Aldo was still sent to SNR. He was returned to AAC, still having seizures and is now at APA! for treatment.



## **"Phillipa"**

Originally given a BCS of 2/9, later changed to 4/9. This was an older cat, whose spine protruded from the body and was dehydrated. It was still sent to SNR, but AHS deemed it ineligible based on BCS and dehydration. When "she" was returned to AAC, it was discovered that it was a "he" and was renamed "Phillipe."



## **"Twitch"**

AAC sent 12-year-old Twitch to SNR but AHS disqualified him. It turns out that Twitch has severe arthritis in his spine and will be on pain medication for the rest of his life. He is now in a foster home as a "Desperate Housecat."





## **"Rocky"**

### **BEFORE SNR:**

Rocky arrived at the Austin Animal Center (AAC) on 8/26/19. Before going through SNR, Rocky was healthy.



### **Intake Photos:**

**Before SNR and After SNR**



### **AFTER SNR:**

When Rocky was brought back to AAC 23 days later (on 9/17/19), he had lost 4 lbs. and was sick with an upper respiratory infection.

## Tab 2

## **Remove Kittens from Austin Animal Center's Shelter Neuter Return Program**

1. 67% mortality rate for outdoor kittens under 5 months, according to Austin Animal Center's own website.
2. 75% mortality rate for kittens under 6 months, according to data cited by Dr. Kate Hurley and Dr. Julie Levy of Maddie's Fund's Million Cat Challenge.
3. Maddie's Fund recommends prioritizing adoption pathways for kittens.
4. Kittens under 6 months are ineligible for Austin Pets Alive!'s Barn Cat Program because "they do not have the knowledge, size or skills to live safely outdoors."

**AMENDMENT TO § 3-1-25 - DISPOSITION OF AN IMPOUNDED ANIMAL.**  
**(to prevent kittens under six months from going through the**  
**Shelter Neuter Return Program at Austin Animal Center)**

City Code Section 3-1-25 (*Disposition of Impounded Animals*) is amended to add the following

Subsection:

(K) Subsection (E) does not apply to non-feral kittens under the age of six months.

# Un-homed Cats in Austin



- 170,000 “community cats” in Austin
- 90% un-neutered
- Over 300,000 kittens born every spring
- Over 200,000 will die of starvation, disease, hit by cars, killed by predators before they are even 5 months old
- Thousands will end up in area shelters

Sources: [Feralcatproject.org](http://Feralcatproject.org); [Journal of American Veterinary Association](http://JournalofAmericanVeterinaryAssociation); [US Cat Population and Neuter Status-Alleycatallies.org](http://US Cat Population and Neuter Status-Alleycatallies.org)

Source: Community Cats Presentation on Austin Animal Center website ([www.austintexas.gov/department/volunteer](http://www.austintexas.gov/department/volunteer); last accessed 12/5/2019)



## **New Paradigms for Shelters and Community Cats**

**Dr. Kate Hurley, DVM, MPVM**  
Koret Shelter Medicine Program  
University of California-Davis  
Davis, California  
[www.sheltermedicine.com](http://www.sheltermedicine.com)

**Dr. Julie Levy, DVM, PhD, DACVIM**  
Maddie's Shelter Medicine Program  
University of Florida  
Gainesville, Florida  
[www.ufsheltermedicine.com](http://www.ufsheltermedicine.com)

### **Introduction**

Historically, most shelters have routinely admitted more healthy cats than could be placed into adoptive homes. While the intention behind this practice has been to protect both cats and communities, the result has been chronically over-crowded shelters and the death of many millions of cats. At one time, this was seen as sadly inevitable. However, new research and innovative programs suggest that there are humane and cost effective alternatives to this traditional approach. These strategies can virtually eliminate both shelter crowding and euthanasia of healthy cats, and include spay/neuter/return programs and scheduled/managed intake to shelters. A holistic approach to unwanted and free roaming cats allows shelters to focus on positive, life-saving programs that account for the needs of pets, wildlife and people in our communities. Below are some of the most frequently asked questions about these new approaches.

### **What are "community cats"?**

"Community cat" is an umbrella definition that includes any un-owned cat. These cats may be "feral" (un-socialized) or friendly, may have been born into the wild or may be lost or abandoned pet cats. Some community cats are routinely fed by one or more community members, while others survive without human intervention. Whatever a cat's individual circumstances, the term "community cat" reflects the reality that for these cats, "home" is within the community rather than in an individual household.

### **How many community cats are there?**

According to the American Veterinary Medicine Association, approximately 30.4% of American households have an average of 2.1 cats[1]. The number of pet cats that are owned in the United States is estimated at approximately 74-82 million, making cats America's most popular pet[1, 2]. Using data from the AVMA 2012 survey, a community's pet cat population can be estimated by dividing the human population (available at [www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov)) by 4.1 (assuming 2.6 persons per household according to

disturbing trend in the number of hoarding and cruelty investigations of such facilities when the number of cats accumulated outstrips the resources of those responsible for the humane care of the cats. Recent cases involve the seizure of 800 cats from the FLOCK sanctuary in Nevada in 2007, 750 cats from the Tiger Ranch Sanctuary in Pennsylvania in 2008, 600 cats from the 10th Life Sanctuary in Florida in 2009, 700 cats from the Haven Acres sanctuary in Florida in 2011, and 700 cats from the Caboodle Ranch sanctuary in Florida in 2012. These cases, in which each facility was presumably established with the best intentions, illustrate the challenge of identifying sustainable nonlethal management options for cats following their removal from the community in which they have made their homes.

#### **Will community cats suffer if we don't take them into shelters?**

Although it has long been assumed that community cats were at great risk for suffering and untimely death if not admitted to a shelter, there is a growing body of evidence that this is not the case. Cats trapped in the community and brought to TNR clinics are generally fit and healthy,[12] with less than 1% requiring euthanasia for debilitating conditions, trauma, or infectious diseases[6]. While the risks of some infections (such as parasites) are higher in community cats than in pet cats, the risk of others is equal (FeLV, FIV) or lower (FIP)[13, 14].

Cats admitted to shelters are likely to be those at higher risk for pre-existing injury and illness, but even so, less than 10% of cats are noted to have a medical condition on intake at many shelters[15]. In the most complete long-term study of community cats in a TNR program, death or euthanasia occurred after an average of 3-5 years of observation[16]. The cats still remaining on the property at the end of the 11-year follow-up period had been present for an average of 7 years.

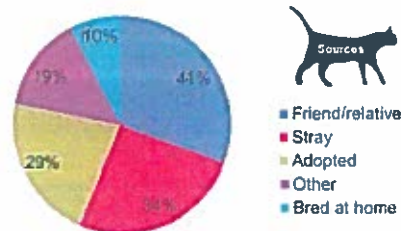
Many community cats do receive some care. Feeding these cats is a common activity, with studies finding up to a quarter of American households feeding one or more cats they do not own [3, 17]. One study found that the 14 month survival rate was 90% for "semi-owned cats" (free roaming cats fed by a community member who did not consider themselves the cat's owner) [18]. There is also a chance that community cats will be adopted into a permanent home. Many cat lovers have either taken a stray cat into their home or know someone who has, and surveys support this observation, finding that cats are actually more likely to be obtained as strays than adopted from shelters or rescue groups [17, 19].

While adult cats can thrive in the community, kittens are less likely to survive. In one study, 75% of feral kittens died or disappeared before 6 months of age, a survival rate similar to other small carnivores[20]. TNR programs will alleviate this risk by reducing reproduction. Kittens should also be prioritized for rehoming through sheltering programs whenever possible[16]. However, euthanasia rates of 75% or higher are not uncommon for shelter cats[9, 10]; thus when a better chance of survival can't be provided by a shelter, healthy kittens may still be better off remaining in place or being rehomed through another avenue.

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## Find new homes for cats?

- **Prioritize adoption pathway for kittens**, owner surrendered cats, cruelty/hoarding cases, and targeted intervention
  - Serious nuisance/public health issues
  - Environmentally sensitive areas
- Prioritize working homes for above categories of adult cats that aren't appropriate for adoption

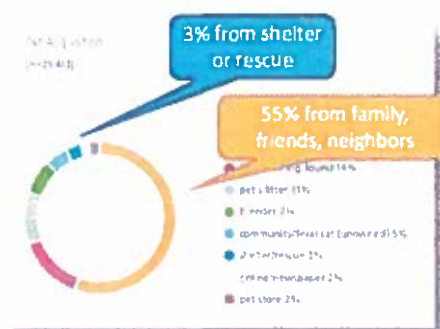


Sources of Pet Acquisition (APPA)

36

## Close the loop on homes that cats already have

- Most pets in disadvantaged communities adopted from a source other than a shelter
- Return to field for friendly, healthy cats can close the loop on sterilization and vaccination for cats already "adopted" from another source
- Open doors for further education and risk mitigation



HSUS Pets for Life Report 2014

37

## DOMATI

と

## RINGWORM ADOPTION

## HURRY

**MEDICAL TRIAGE &  
WOUNDS CLINIC**

WIMBORNE EIGHT

**Model with 2000**

🔍 Type here to search

What do I do when I bring the cats home?

Yes! How would it be used?

The youngest cats in the Barn Cat Program are approximately six months old. **ADAP** will not adopt younger kittens as barn cats, as they don't yet have the knowledge or experience of adults to remain safe outdoors. Most cats in the barn program are young

**Size of age to remain safe, indeed!** Most cats in the barn program are young adults between one and five years of age, though we do have younger and older cats available occasionally if you have an age preference. Just let us know and we will do our best to accommodate you!

## SNR KITTEN OUTCOMES 01.01.2019 - 11.30.2019

2 months	3 months	4 months	5 months	Total
5	93	68	28	194

Source: Austin Animal Center Data Portal

<https://data.austintexas.gov/browse?q=austin%20animal%20center&sortBy=relevance&utf8=%E2%9C%93>

# Tab 3

## **Ideas for Relieving Austin Animal Center Cat Population**

### **REDUCE INTAKE:**

- **Microchipping**
  1. Increase public awareness of this free service. Increase Public Service Announcement (PSA) advertising, place brochures in vet clinics and pet supply stores, do mailers and make posts on social media (Facebook, Nextdoor, Craigslist).
  2. Hold more microchip events, even at Austin Animal Center (AAC).
- **Public Education of Shelter Neuter Return (SNR)**
  1. If the public is made aware of the program and that their cat may go through SNR if brought to the shelter without a registered microchip with current information, it may lead to them getting their cats microchipped as a preventative measure.
  2. Do more to encourage alternatives to the public other than bringing healthy cats to the shelter as a first option because not every cat outside is lost. For example, encourage people to post on social media, file a 311 report, get cat scanned, post flyers, foster.
- **Community Outreach**
  1. Create a team of volunteers through the Community Cats Program to go to targeted neighborhoods to ask residents if their cats are spayed or neutered.
  2. If their cats are not spayed or neutered, guide them to Emancipet for surgery and to AAC for free microchipping.
  3. Use money from the Donations Fund to help with any costs.

### **INCREASE RECLAIM RATES:**

- **Microchipping**
  1. The more people who are made aware of the SNR program and AAC's free microchip service, the more likely cats would be reclaimed.
  2. Emphasize the importance of registering the microchip and keeping the contact information current (again, cats without this information may go through SNR).
  3. When microchip information seems to be a dead end, contact Austin Lost and Found Pets (ALFP) administrators, who regularly do extensive research on microchip and owner information.
- **Stray Cat Volunteer Team**
  1. Create a team of volunteers to take and upload photos of stray cats to AAC's website daily.
  2. Also post these cats on the ALFP website.
- **SNR Cat Listings**
  1. Leave SNR cat listings on AAC's website for 14 days, as is done for "Found" listings.
  2. Circulate a nightly report of SNR-eligible cats to stakeholders (staff, volunteers, fosters, rescue groups) using the same fields as already available on the data portal; if possible, add a field for whether or not the cat has a known caretaker.



## **REDUCE CAT POPULATION IN SHELTER:**

- **Customer Service/Hospitality Staff & Volunteers**
  1. Increase the number of Customer Service/Hospitality staff on weekends, particularly during free adoption events. The line to adopt often gets very long and closes hours before the shelter closes, meaning not as many animals are getting adopted. People get frustrated, never come back, and adopt elsewhere.
  2. Reinstate assigning a Customer Service/Hospitality staff member in the cat building on weekends, at least when the number of cats exceeds dogs (for example, during kitten season).
- **Website/Social Media**
  1. Make website listings for cats more robust (good with other cats, dogs, children, etc.), similar to listings by Austin Pets Alive! and Austin Humane Society.
  2. Make daily cat posts on both Facebook and Instagram showcasing adoptable cats.
  3. Use Facebook for cat foster pleas during space crises.
- **Off-Site Relief**
  1. Increase off-site adoption locations and events, such as "Caturday."
  2. Expand the Travis County Correctional Complex (TCCC) Jail Foster Program to include more cats.
  3. Seek out cat fosters through other City of Austin departments, similar to when the Austin Parks and Recreation Department fostered a cat last year. If successful, reach out to local businesses as well.
- **Adoption Fees**
  1. Austin Humane Society offers buy one, get one free ("BOGO") kittens year-round, and AAC should do the same thing as kittens do better in pairs anyway.
  2. Consider waiving fees any time the cat population reaches a certain number or when kennel space is limited ("Code Red").
- **Foster & Transfer SNR-Eligible Cats**
  1. Allow SNR-eligible cats to be eligible for foster.
  2. Allow SNR-eligible cats to be transferred to rescue partners.

## Tab 4

# Position Statement on Community Cats and Community Cat Programs

## INTRODUCTION

The ASPCA supports humane, lawful, and effective strategies for humanely managing community cat<sup>[1]</sup> populations, including programs involving trap-neuter-return-monitor (TNRM), return to field (RTF) or, as a last resort, community cat relocation (CCR). Such community cat programs not only provide life-saving options for cats who might otherwise be euthanized when admitted to a shelter but also can stabilize, and even reduce over time, the population of community cat colonies (Levy and Crawford, 2004; Robertson, 2008).

Community cat populations generally consist of a mixture of feral cats<sup>[2]</sup>, semi-socialized cats and lost and abandoned pets. Community cats are found in all areas of the country and tend to gather together in colonies. No one knows how many community cats live in the United States, but estimates are in the tens of millions. Community cat issues are complex and varied, impacted by geography, climate, the presence of other animals including predators, past and current community cat programming, cultural norms and numerous other factors. As such, multiple approaches, crafted to address the particular needs of a given community, are often necessary in order to effect a positive impact for cats and the communities in which they live.

Community cat programs may also raise legal issues, including those related to laws prohibiting abandonment of animals or defining and creating obligations for animal owners and caretakers. Before engaging in any community cat program, legal counsel should be consulted to ensure that the program's activities are permitted under applicable state and local law.

## COMMUNITY CAT PROGRAMS AND THEIR ALTERNATIVES

As discussed in detail below, it is the ASPCA's position that *unsocialized* community cats are best served by focusing resources on TNRM and RTF programs, distribution of exclusionary devices (such as fencing and keeping garbage bins closed) and deterrents, and public education concerning the humane management of community cats. **Socialized community cats are best served by**

placement into new homes whenever possible.[3] In all cases, community cat programs involve sterilization which decreases nuisance behaviors and increases welfare. To achieve the additional goal of decreasing the overall size of the community cat population, research has shown that a critical number of cats in a colony, neighborhood or other defined location must all be sterilized within a relatively short time period. Studies have estimated that more than 60 to 80% of remaining intact cats (Budke and Slater 2009, Miller et al 2014) in the group must be sterilized each year for the population to decline over time.

The alternatives to community cat programs, including trap-euthanize[4] strategies, have been shown to be impractical, ineffective, and often inhumane. With the exception of closed populations of cats on islands, attempts to eradicate cat colonies almost universally failed. Cats who are removed are replaced through reproduction, the movement of other cats into the territory and the addition of lost and abandoned animals who repopulate the vacated space (Campbell, et al 2011). Feeding bans are difficult to enforce and are ineffective at decreasing cat populations. For those cats who have become dependent on food provided by a caregiver, a feeding ban can be inhumane, as it often forces cats to subsist on insufficient resources.

The ASPCA does not support the management of cat colonies in ecologically sensitive areas; in areas where demolition or development is likely to cause harm or where cats are being subjected to harm or abuse. In such cases, the ASPCA recommends relocation of community cats and/or the adoption of friendly cats. After the cats are removed, exclusionary measures and deterrents should be put into place to prevent immigration of new cats to the area.

It is important to note that community cat programs should be considered as just one component of a multi-pronged approach to cat issues in the community served. A comprehensive approach requires that community cat stakeholder groups be engaged and any program be implemented in partnership with other TNRM, RTF or relocation programs, and with low/no cost sterilization programs. Any cat program implemented in isolation is less likely to be successful and often will not efficiently utilize whatever resources are available to support cats, whether community cats or owned cats.

A discussion of considerations and guidelines for TNRM, RTF, and CCR program continues below. In addition to the guidelines referenced herein, additional minimum guidelines for RTF programs are included in Addendum 2.

**Program Considerations: Trap-Neuter-Return-Monitor (TNRM)**

Ideally, the management of community cats should include trapping, scanning for the presence of a microchip, vaccination, sterilization, ear "tipping" (surgical removal of the tip of one ear as a visible sign that the cat has been sterilized), microchipping (when feasible), returning the cat to its original location, and caregiver(s) monitoring and caring for the colony, e.g., ensuring the cats receive adequate food, water and shelter. Sterilization not only prevents birth, but also largely eliminates the objectionable spraying, vocalizing and fighting behaviors of cats in the colony.

TNRM programs should only return the cats if they have a caregiver, if the environment is conducive to successful outdoor living, and if there are no known threats by local residents to the cats. Recognition by animal control officers and shelter staff that an ear-tipped cat has already been sterilized allows for healthy cats to remain at or to be returned to their origin, rather than be admitted to an animal shelter. TNRM programs should also assist with installation of exclusionary measures or deterrents to limit cats' presence in dangerous, ecologically sensitive or contested areas.

TNRM programs are preferred over RTF programs because;

- 1) services are provided to the cat without involving admission to an animal shelter, which increases stress for the cat and the potential for exposure to disease, and
- 2) the involvement of a caregiver increases the likelihood of success of the community cat population, by supporting the wellbeing and safety of the cats, and provides a point of contact for the community when issues or complaints arise.

*Resource for Best Practice: Guide to Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR) and Colony Care from Alley Cat Allies, the ASPCA and the Mayor's Alliance for NYC's Animals ([http://www.aspcapro.org/sites/default/files/TNR\\_workshop\\_handbook\\_3.pdf](http://www.aspcapro.org/sites/default/files/TNR_workshop_handbook_3.pdf))*



**Program Considerations: Return-to-Field (RTF).**

RTF programs involve community cats who have been admitted to an animal shelter, brought in by animal control personnel or by members of the public. The ASPCA estimates that 3.4 million cats enter animal shelters each year, an event that may result in an opportunity for their owner to find them or new family to adopt them, but which also puts cats at risk of extreme stress, illness and euthanasia. Although a home for social cats and TNRM for unsocial community cats represent ideal results for those cats, it is important to consider the potential benefit of other programs like RTF given the millions of cats at risk in communities and in our nation's shelters.

To be considered for an RTF program, the cat must be unowned, ineligible or unlikely to be successful in an adoption program (with very rare exceptions, social cats admitted to animal shelters should be routed into adoption programs that demonstrate a high placement rate rather than RTF programs), be able to be returned to the location where found, and appear to have been thriving in their previous environment without known threats to their safety. It is crucial that the exact "found" address be available and recorded as part of the intake process, and every effort should be made to identify whether or not the cat is owned, including scanning for the presence of a microchip, looking for other forms of pet identification such as a collar or identification tag and placing "found" flyers within a few blocks of where the cat was found. If a cat qualifies for an RTF program, the services provided to the cat are similar to those of a TNRM program, e.g., vaccination, sterilization, ear "tipping" and microchipping.

Unlike TNRM programs, RTF programs rarely require that a caregiver be available to monitor and provide care for the cat following release. For this reason, the ASPCA does not consider RTF programs ideal for social cats and/or preferable to TNRM programs, and the use of RTF programs should never supersede robust and aggressive adoption programs for social cats ([ASPCA's Position Statement on Responsibilities of Animal Shelters \(/about-us/aspcanet.org/Policy-Statements/Position-Statements/Position-Statement-Responsibilities-Animal-Shelters\)](https://www.aspcanet.org/About-Us/Policy-Statements/Position-Statements/Position-Statement-Responsibilities-Animal-Shelters)). However, where permitted by law, RTF programs can represent an acceptable option for unsocial cats who would otherwise be at great risk of euthanasia in a shelter environment.

*Resource for Best Practice: Guide to Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR) and Colony Care from Alley Cat Allies, the ASPCA and the Mayor's Alliance for NYC's Animals*  
([http://www.aspcapro.org/sites/default/files/TNR\\_workshop\\_handbook.3.pdf](http://www.aspcapro.org/sites/default/files/TNR_workshop_handbook.3.pdf))

*Resource for Minimum Guidelines: ASPCA's Minimum Guidelines for RTF Programs (Addendum 2)*

### **Program Considerations: Community Cat Relocation**

Community cat relocation should only be considered as a **last resort** when the cats involved are at known risk, other community cat management strategies are unavailable, and relocation would be permitted under applicable law. Relocation is resource intensive and involves identifying a new location for the cat(s), trapping, scanning for the presence of a microchip, vaccination, sterilization, ear "tipping"), microchipping (when feasible), transportation and finally a carefully managed introduction to the new location. Cats being relocated are released in a new territory, introduced to an existing colony or released in a barn, warehouse or similar location. These locations can be rural or urban, are commonly on private property, and involve caregivers who own that building/property and who are willing to monitor and provide basic care for the cats. Generally, minimum guidelines for RTF programs apply also to community cat relocation programs.

Information regarding a variety of Community Cat Relocation programs can be found at <http://www.alleycat.org/Relocation> (<http://www.alleycat.org/Relocation>).

### **Wildlife and Environmental Considerations**

In spite of rigorous debate between advocates of cats and advocates of wildlife, the desired outcome for each of these groups is the same – a reduction in the population of community cats. The ASPCA believes that TNRM, RTF and relocation programs are the most effective, humane and responsible ways to manage or lower the community cat population over time in conjunction with programs for owned cats including easy access to free/low cost sterilization services and free collars and identification tags with the owner's phone number.

While the challenges faced by wildlife are significant and complex, community cats are, at times, erroneously singled out as a convenient target. Indeed, it is well accepted that human impacts like construction, roads, nest disturbance, light

pollution, pesticides, destruction of habitat, etc. are the primary threats to wildlife, including threatened and endangered species, as well as changes in the environment. The existence of community cats is ultimately traceable to human activity, and communities bear responsibility for solving the problems they themselves have created. It is unscientific and irrational to choose a single factor, like the presence of cats, and assign blame for the challenges faced by wildlife. Furthermore, even if the presence of cats is shown to impact wildlife, community cat programs, which have as their goal a humane reduction in cat population, remain a desirable solution to minimizing any actual (rather than perceived) threats to other species.

Moreover, scientifically-based knowledge of the success of cat or other predator removal is incomplete. Some studies (Baker et al 2008, Doherty and Ritchie 2016) have specifically examined conditions before and after cat removal and have not shown an increase in breeding success or survival of the species of interest. Additionally, removing enough of any predator to decrease their population size is quite difficult. If the removal of an introduced species such as cats is considered, the ASPCA recommends a comprehensive assessment to determine the potential impact of such an intervention. Without such an assessment, it is quite possible to produce unintended and undesirable consequences for the remaining species and cause more harm than good.

## **CONCLUSION**

While we continue our work to support robust adoption programs for cats, millions of cats who have no home remain at risk across the country. Community cats exist because of generations of human action and inaction, therefore humanely addressing the needs of these cats and implementing programs which help prevent their reproduction, are the responsibility of the communities in which they live. The ASPCA encourages cat advocates, animal shelters and rescues, local government officials and the public to work together, and believes that lawful TNRM, RTF, and, as a last resort, community cat relocation programs, are humane and effective approaches for managing and controlling community cat populations.

## **ADDENDUMS**



### **Addendum 1: Reference List and Other Resources**

### **Addendum 2: Minimum Guidelines for Return-to-Field Programs (RTF)**

For reference, the ASPCA defines RTF (Return-to-Field) / SNR (Shelter-Neuter-Return) as a shelter program for community cats who have been admitted to the shelter which involves returning apparently healthy, mature (generally 16 weeks or older, no less than 4 pounds in weight) free-roaming cats back to the location where they were found after the cats are altered, vaccinated and sometimes microchipped. These cats may or may not have a known caregiver.

RTF programs differ from TNRM (Trap-Neuter-Return-Monitor) and TNR (Trap-Neuter-Return) programs in that the cats involved have been admitted to a shelter, providing a potential life-saving option for cats who are not suitable candidates for the shelter's already strong adoption program. TNRM or TNR programs provide services for community cats, but don't admit or shelter the cats.

When considering the implementation of Return-to-Field programs, the ASPCA recommends these basic guidelines and offers several additional considerations.

#### **Minimum Guidelines**

- Determine and state the specific goal(s) of the RTF program, for example; a reduction of cat euthanasias in the community, or reduction in the number of nuisance cat calls, or a decrease in overall shelter population of cats or shortening the length of stay for cats in the shelter.
- Establish a description of what the RTF program is, how it will work and how program success will be assessed. **Program guidelines and policies should be established in writing.** Program guidelines, policies, and logistics such as messaging and communication with local residents may be driven by the type of RTF model being considered. There are a variety of RTF program models in use across the country, including;
  - proactively targeting specific neighborhoods of high stray intake,

- offering RTF as an alternative live outcome to citizens who bring in stray cats or are requesting assistance with a stray cat,
- or some combination of those two models.
- Ensure compliance with local ordinances and state law. When the law doesn't accommodate an RTF program, it can be helpful to seek official permission to conduct a pilot project to demonstrate impact and effectiveness.
- A consistent communications and outreach program must be in place and be specific to the program model(s) being implemented.
  - General program information – share information with the public regarding the program; including where the program is operating, how citizens can get more information and what other programs are available to increase lives saved and decrease shelter intake.
  - Targeted (location specific) programs – share information in the neighborhood where RTF will be implemented about how the program works, where residents can get more information or request services (like trap-neuter-return-management training and spay/neuter services). Share this information in a manner that's most likely to reach neighborhood residents including media outreach, door hangers, community bulletins, etc.
  - Alternative Live Release programs - if the program is being offered as an alternative live outcome for stray cats, be prepared to discuss this option, including details regarding how the program works, when residents call with concerns about community cats.
  - Humane deterrents – for any RTF program, staff should be available to respond to nuisance cat complaints, including discussing and troubleshooting humane deterrents with citizens contacting the organization with complaints or concerns about free-roaming cats. Talking points, scripts and FAQs developed for internal use by staff will help ensure consistency in

messaging and direction to the public. Handout materials for the public will also be helpful.

- Time specific – for both targeted and alternative live outcome program models, it is crucial that local residents be notified when a cat is returned to the field. Notification should occur at the time of return and include information on the program and the services provided to the cat. Notification should be provided in a manner most likely to be received by neighborhood residents. Contact information must also be available so residents can ask questions or request services.
- Make best efforts to agree on the location of critical habitat areas in your community, so that the protection of those areas can be taken into account when establishing appropriate locations for RTF programs.
- Define a process by which cats are determined to be eligible for RTF or not. This requires accurate intake data be collected at the time of admission so that a thoughtful decision can be made regarding program options for the cat. For example:
  - Was the cat owner surrendered or stray?
  - If stray, what is the reason for shelter intake, i.e., complaint-based, general concern for well-being, or other?
  - What information is available about potential caregivers or owners?
  - How long has the cat been seen in the neighborhood?
  - What evidence is there, if any, that someone has been providing care/food/shelter for the cat?
  - Has anyone complained about the cat, or cats being a nuisance or unwanted in the area?
  - Has anyone in the neighborhood threatened the well-being of the cat, or other free-roaming cats in the neighborhood?
- Very specific information (from the intake process) about where the cat was found or trapped must be gathered. A street address or cross streets with a description of the exact location is most vital (trapped at the corner

of 1<sup>st</sup> and University, in the SW corner, by the dead tree). This information is critical for those transporting RTF cats back to their home.

- Return the cat to where it was found, using reasonable precautions. If the exact location is no longer accessible, a release location must be very nearby, with no major barriers or dangers in the pathway to the original location. Watch for busy roads, fencing, or territory that is no longer safe for the cats to inhabit, etc.
- Follow TNR Best Practices regarding trapping, ear-tipping, housing, transporting and release.
  - [http://www.aspcapro.org/sites/default/files/TNR\\_workshop\\_hand](http://www.aspcapro.org/sites/default/files/TNR_workshop_hand)  
([http://www.aspcapro.org/sites/default/files/TNR\\_workshop\\_han](http://www.aspcapro.org/sites/default/files/TNR_workshop_han))
  - <http://www.animalsheltering.org/resources/all-topics/cats/managing-community-cats.html>  
(<http://www.animalsheltering.org/resources/all-topics/cats/managing-community-cats.html>)
  - <http://www.alleycat.org/trap-neuter-return>  
(<http://www.alleycat.org/trap-neuter-return>)
  - <http://www.petsmartcharities.org/what-we-do/spay-neuter>  
(<http://www.petsmartcharities.org/what-we-do/spay-neuter>)
- Ensure the RTF program is complemented by a rigorous adoption program for friendly pet cats, as adoption is the preferred outcome for such cats. See "additional considerations" for more information.
- The minimum age for cats eligible for a return to field program is generally 16 weeks of age. Cats of this age are more likely to be able to fare well on their own and are old enough to be rabies vaccinated. There are "additional considerations" below regarding younger kittens and queens with their litter.
- If the RTF program includes the intake and care of cats appearing to be feral or extremely fearful, as mentioned previously, TNRM/TNR best practices should be followed for the housing, care and handling of those cats, including segregated housing, shortened length of stay and minimal handling.



- Only RTF cats that, upon physical exam, appear to be thriving and healthy.
- Don't RTF specific cats if it's not safe to do so (prohibitive weather events, threats from neighborhood residents, destruction of their territory, etc.).
- All cats in an RTF program must be vaccinated for rabies (at a minimum) and be spayed or neutered with an ear tip.
- Cats should NOT be considered for RTF who are:
  - not thriving outdoors,
  - declawed or blind,
  - previously indoor-only, or primarily indoor-only based on intake information,
  - unable to live on their own (for example, neonate kittens without a mother, a cat with a chronic condition that requires medication or other ongoing treatment, etc.)
  - suffering from an acute or chronic condition (eye infections, abscesses, amputations)

#### Additional Considerations and Guiding Questions

- Friendly Pet Cats. If RTF is considered for friendly, healthy cats that would be suitable for adoption as a pet, it should be considered a last resort option. When determining whether to include friendly pet cats in an RTF program, consider the following:
  - What haven't you tried yet to expand your adoption program? See ASPCAPro.org for some new ideas.
  - What is your adoption rate for friendly, healthy cats? If your adoption rate is low, consider new ideas for adoption first before RTF.
  - What is your overall Live Release Rate for cats?
  - What is your average Length of Stay for friendly, healthy cats? If your LOS is long, see <http://www.aspcapro.org/stay> (<http://www.aspcapro.org/stay>) for ideas on how to fast track and shorten LOS.

- What percentage of your feline intake are strays?
- What percentage of your feline intake are friendly?
- What percentage of your feline intake are healthy?
- How are you determining "healthy", "thriving", and "friendly"?
- 
- Collaboration. A collaborative approach is key to the success of community wide programs for animals at risk. All local shelters and animal control agencies should be involved when possible. When local cooperation is sought but not achieved, it's still important to address and resolve potential active opposition to such programs. Often, seeking permission to conduct a pilot RTF project to demonstrate potential impact is a good first step when local resistance exists. Consider these guiding questions to help determine your program approach:
  - What is your relationship/reputation in the community?
  - What is your relationship with other animal protection organizations and community cat stakeholders in your community?
  - What other community cat stakeholders can you work with to determine if there is a caregiver or feeder for a cat when he or she is RTF'd? Other community cat organizations often have vital connections into the community and can identify feeders or caregivers. In addition, they may have access to have low cost options for spay/neuter of other cats in colonies when only one is returned.
  - What is the general level of acceptance of free-roaming/community cats in your community? Who will handle complaints from residents about cats being to their territories? What resources will be available to those residents?
  - What is the incidence of cruelty to cats in specific neighborhoods where RTF is being considered? Neighborhoods with recent reports of animal cruelty or long term cat related conflicts are unlikely to be safe for the cats in an RTF program.



- Community Cat Programs. RTF programs should be considered as one component of a multi-pronged approach to community cat issues. If implemented in isolation – fewer resources will be available overall to support cats in the community and ultimately the goal of reducing the community cat population and related nuisance issues is unlikely to be achieved. A comprehensive approach requires that RTF programs engage community cat stakeholder groups and be implemented in partnership with TNRM programs and low/no cost spay/neuter services for the public who own cats. In addition to the items to consider above:
  - What complimentary services are offered in your community? Is TNR already in place? What is the availability and cost of spay/neuter services?
  - What other support programs do you have in place, ie foster, socialization, etc.?
  - Is transportation for spay/neuter a limitation for owner or community cats and how could that be provided?
  - How might a cat food bank support retention of pet cats and encourage new feeders or caregivers? Is one available?
  - Are there groups that can provide cat shelters (<http://aspcapro.org/node/62317> (<http://aspcapro.org/node/62317>)) for feeders or caregivers? This is particularly an issue if there are few existing shelter options and bad weather is common.
  - What other community cat stakeholders can you work with to determine if a cat has an owner, caregiver or feeder?
  - What efforts can you and other collaborators make to offer humane deterrents?
- Age. Although releasing cats at or older than 16 weeks of age is a minimum guideline, there are other considerations regarding age that can be taken into account. Kittens younger than 16 weeks of age can be returned if a known caregiver is available and has agreed to the time and location of return. Also, sometimes the best potential outcome for a queen

and her young litter may be an RTF if the weather, location and a caregiver are all conducive to success. Questions to take into consideration:

- What other support programs do you have in place, i.e. foster, socialization, etc.?
- What other community cat stakeholders can you work with to determine if there is a caregiver or feeder?
- At what age can your spay/neuter resources provide services for the kittens?
- 
- Weather. Cold weather is not necessarily unsafe weather, though it's important to consider available shelter and food sources, and whether or not the weather is extreme or normal for that location. If the cat has just been altered – consider a lengthened surgery recovery period.
  - If you know where the cats shelter, consider whether weather makes access to food and shelter difficult (e.g. snow high enough to block shelter entrances and exits; ability of feeder to make it to feeding location)
  - What other community cat stakeholders can you work with to determine if there is a caregiver or feeder?
  - Can spay/neuter protocols be altered to only shave the cats minimally where absolutely necessary to cut down on body heat loss?

### Addendum 3: Definitions for Community Cat Terms

[1] "Community Cats" is a term used to describe outdoor, unowned, free-roaming cats. These cats could be friendly, feral, adults, kittens, healthy, sick, altered and/or unaltered. They may or may not have a caregiver. By this definition, the only outdoor free-roaming cats who are *not* community cats are those that have an owner.

[2] Although "feral" is a well-defined term in biology and behavioral ecology (see below), in animal sheltering it is a term used to describe a cat exhibiting certain behaviors. "Feral cats," as a subset of community cats, is a commonly used phrase generally referring to a cat who appears unaccustomed to close contact with people and, if taken to an animal shelter, is typically not a candidate for adoption into a home as a pet. In biology and behavioral ecology, feral refers to a domesticated animal who is now living wild or free and is not socialized to humans. Cats commonly referred to as feral or behaving in a feral manner may or may not actually fit this definition. Feral behavior can mask the social history of the cat. For example, a frightened cat may demonstrate feral behavior one day, but with time to acclimate will no longer demonstrate such behavior. The kittens of feral-presenting cats can typically be acclimated to humans particularly but not exclusively if behavior modification is done before 8 weeks of age.

[3] Testing for feline immunodeficiency virus and feline leukemia, while not always practical for community cats in general, is recommended for any kittens or adult cats who are to be placed for adoption or who are showing signs of illness; a positive test result should be confirmed by subsequent testing in order to rule out false positive findings.

[4] "Trap-Euthanize" (TE) is a program involving trapping and euthanizing community cats. This program may be implemented in response to complaints from local residents or conducted by wildlife officials or others in an effort to reduce or eliminate the community cat population. These programs are often opposed by the general public, and are often seen as posing a significant risk for at-large pet cats. TE is sometimes advocated for as a means of population control but data does not support its long term efficacy as the percent of cat population actually trapped and euthanized each year is typically too low. The ASPCA does not consider TE programs to be humane or effective options for addressing community cat issues.

## **Other Organization Position Statements**

### **American Veterinary Medical Association**

Free-roaming abandoned and feral cats that are not in properly managed colonies should be removed from their environment and treated in the same manner as other abandoned and stray animals...

Public, private, and not-for-profit humane organizations and individuals must make every effort to promote adoption of acceptable unowned cats and implement sterilization programs.

The AVMA recognizes that managed colonies are controversial. However, properly managed programs can improve quality of life for these cats... The goal of colony management should be continual reduction and eventual elimination of the colony through attrition.

(<https://www.avma.org/KB/Policies/Pages/Free-roaming-Abandoned-and-Feral-Cats.aspx>, last accessed 12/5/2019)

### **American Association of Feline Practitioners**

The AAFP strongly supports reducing the numbers of unowned, free-roaming, abandoned and feral cats through humane capture (with placement in homes where appropriate)...

The AAFP supports appropriately managed cat colonies.

(<https://catvets.com/public/PDFs/PositionStatements/FreeRoaming.pdf>, last accessed 12/5/2019)

### **Association of Shelter Veterinarians**

TNR programs should be part of an overall management strategy that includes public education, the promotion of responsible cat ownership to reduce abandonment, as well as affordable and easily accessible spay-neuter and adoption programs.

(<https://www.sheltervet.org/assets/docs/position-statements/trapneuterreturn.pdf>, last accessed 12/5/2019) *ASV has no position statement available on SNR or free-roaming cats generally.*

### **Humane Society**

If the cat is tame, the first step is to try to find the cat's owner. If the owner can't be found, step two is to try to find a permanent home for the cat through a shelter, rescue or other means.

...

Once a cat or colony of cats has been TNR-ed, it's ideal if a dedicated caretaker provides food, water and shelter, monitors the cats for sickness or injury and TNRs new feral cats who arrive. Ideally, kittens young enough to be socialized and new tame cats who arrive are removed from the colony for possible adoption.

<https://www.humanesociety.org/resources/outdoor-cats-faq>, last accessed 12/5/2019)