



Gaithersburg Free Spay and Neuter

Project #
FY16--109

County: Montgomery County

Number of Cats Spayed:	20	Number of Dogs Spayed:	13
Number of Cats Neutered:	21	Number of Dogs Neutered:	18

Amount Received: \$10,035 Amount Remaining (to be returned to MDA): \$0

Project Synopsis:

This program targeted low-income pet owners in Gaithersburg. The goal was to provide 100 free spay/neuters of cats and dogs along with providing rabies vaccines to those pets who were not up-to-date.



Gaithersburg Free Spay & Neuter Program

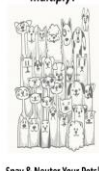
The *Gaithersburg Free Spay & Neuter Program* is a NO-COST program for low-income Gaithersburg pet owners. If you qualify, the program will pay the *entire cost* of spaying or neutering your cat or dog.



For more information and to apply go to: awlmc.org

The *Gaithersburg Free Spay & Neuter Program* is funded by the Maryland Department of Agriculture, Spay & Neuter Grants Program.

We can't add but we sure can multiply!



Spay & Neuter Your Pets!



El Programa Gratuita de Esterilización y Castración de Gaithersburg

El Programa de Esterilización y Castración Gratuita de Gaithersburg es un programa de esterilización y castración sin costo para mascotas con dueños de bajos ingresos en Gaithersburg. Si usted reúne los requisitos, el programa pagara *el costo total* de la esterilización o castración de su gato o perro.



Para más información y para aplicar visita: awlmc.org

The *El Programa de Esterilización y Castración Gratuita de Gaithersburg* es posible gracias a el Departamento de Agricultura de Maryland, El Programa de fondos de Esterilización y Castración

Project Description:

The Animal Welfare League of Montgomery County is a 501(c)(3) non-profit cat shelter founded in 2005. Since then we have placed over 1,300 cats in their forever homes. Along with an adoption program, the AWLMC provides pet food to low-income Montgomery County pet owners through Chomper Pet Foodbank. Also, since 2010, the AWLMC has run a low-cost spay/neuter program with over 3,000 pets having been altered, thus decreasing the number of unplanned and unwanted litters.

Montgomery County, including Gaithersburg, has a population with higher than average income, but there are areas within Gaithersburg that reflect a different demographic. Many pet owners in the target area have low incomes, per HUD guidelines, and/or receive public assistance. The Gaithersburg Free Spay & Neuter Program sought to reach those pet owners for whom the low-cost option was beyond their means. The goal was set to alter 100 pets (70 cats & 30 dogs). This was based on the historical data of number of procedures done in the target area through the AWLMC low-cost spay/neuter program. The number of spay/neuters through this program added to the number done through the low cost program would result in a 50% increase from prior years.



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The original target area was Gaithersburg, but as the project progressed pet owners from other parts of Montgomery County were asking to participate. After speaking with the project manager for the State, we were given the OK to expand the program to qualifying pet owners throughout the County.

Summary of Approach:

*December 2015-January 2016: Designing of English language flyers, applications, information sheets and other publicity items. The online application and website information was completed. Met with participating vet to discuss logistics of program.

*February 2016: Spanish language information available online and in print. Publicity included articles in local papers, notice in the Washington Post along with a press release by the City of Gaithersburg. The first online application was received. Social media postings began.

*March 2016: First spay done. Volunteers did a mass distribution of flyers throughout target area. Flyers were posted in local businesses, libraries, apartments, and non-profits. Outreach began at the monthly rabies clinic hosted by MCASAC.

*April - October 2016: Posting on social media and outreach at monthly rabies clinic continued. Follow-up emails are done to pet owners who began the application process but did not follow through. The organization's low-cost spay/neuter program began contacting applicants for their program who lived in the target area to see if they qualified for the program. Extra funds were requested of the AWLMC to cover costs related to the spay/neuters but not allowed by the State. The AWLMC added \$650 to be used for these costs. In October the State allowed, on a case-by-case basis, grant funds to be used for pets requiring extra care related to the spay/neuter. By the end of the program there were 2 cases of pyometra, 2 cases of undescended testicles, and 3 cases of complications following surgery.

*November-December 2016: Program was expanded beyond the initial target area of Gaithersburg to include all of Montgomery County. By the end of the project, approximately 22% of procedures were done on non-Gaithersburg pets. The number of applicants was slowing down at this point and it appeared that the funds were not going to be used by year end. After a discussion with the Grants Program Manager, the program was extended through the first quarter of 2017.

*January-March 2017: Additional postings were done on social media including FB pages of the HSUS and MCASAC. An uptick in applications was seen. Follow-up emails and phone calls to prior applicants were done to encourage them to submit the required paperwork. In mid-February, the online application was removed from the AWLMC website along with all information about the program. Enough applications were expected at that point to warrant the removal. By the beginning of March all funds had been spent. The AWLMC provided extra funding to cover surgeries for pets whose owners had applied prior to the application being removed and followed through with required paperwork.

Accomplishments:

A total of 72 pets were altered; 41 cats & 31 dogs. Of the 31 dogs, 15 were pitbull mixes or chihuahua mix - two of the most common breeds found in shelters. More than half of the pets altered were over 2 years in age. These pets had most likely produced litters throughout the years, contributing to the numbers of homeless pets. The AWLMC paid for an additional 8 pets once the funds were gone but certificates were outstanding and used.

The number of pets altered was below the original goal of 100. The factors contributing to the lower numbers were: 1) The percentage of dogs came in much higher than anticipated and budgeted. The cost per dog versus the cost per cat was approximately 50% higher. 2) Lack of experience in understanding the total costs involved. Being part of a cat rescue, we did not think to add in the budget e-collars for the dogs. 3) There were a number of pets who needed more care beyond that of the standard spay/neuter but related to the procedure. The State approved the use of grant funds, on a case-by-case basis, to cover the extra costs. Pyometra was found in 2 dogs with one case being very serious. Participating in this program saved the lives of those dogs.



Dollars were stretched by finding no-cost ways of publicizing the program. The Washington Post posted information on the program in their Animal Watch section and local publications within the target area were happy to publish press releases. Posting was done on multiple community Facebook pages including the HSUS page and MCASAC page. The City of Gaithersburg ran information about the program on their website. Flyers and posters were distributed by AWLMC volunteers throughout the target area in libraries, stores, apartments, and more. No money was spent on publicity and very little was spent on printing.

The AWLMC provided extra funding to cover the cost of procedures for pets whose owners had applied prior to the end of the application period. Included in that was the extra care for 2 pets who developed complications after their surgery and required hospitalization. In total the AWLMC provided approximately \$3,000.

In 2015 and 2016, the low-cost spay/neuter program run by the AWLMC averaged 140 pets being altered per year in Gaithersburg. The additional 72 animals altered through this program resulted in a more than 50% increase in pets, within Gaithersburg, who will not be part in adding to the homeless pet population.

Community awareness about the AWLMC was increased. Many local businesses were not aware of our presence in their neighborhood until volunteers went store-to-store asking to post program flyers. Our presence at the MCASAC monthly rabies clinic not only increased exposure for the AWLMC in general, but also made the public aware of the low-cost spay/neuter program and the Chompers Pet Foodbank. Our presence also helped in creating a good working relationship with the MCASAC animal control officers.

Lessons Learned:

- 1) Allow adequate time to find vets to partner with - this can be a slow process and took more time than anticipated.
- 2) Look beyond target area for vets- we focused on vets within Montgomery County and specifically ones close to our target area. This not only limited our options but increased our cost/animal since there are no low-cost spay/neuter vets in the county. In reviewing reports from other organizations, Spay Now in Laurel was used by multiple grant winners regardless of the organization's location. Pet owners are willing to travel outside their local area to take advantage of such a beneficial program.
- 3) Ask more questions of the vet to understand what the total costs/animal will be. What are extra costs for being in heat, needing an E collar, undescended testicles, etc.
- 4) There are many ways to publicize for free. Social media offers many opportunities along with neighborhood newspapers; both online and print versions.
- 5) Past winners of the grant are a wealth of information. With the common goal of decreasing the numbers of homeless pets, all the organizations contacted were eager to share their knowledge and experience.
- 6) Read the final reports from prior years. There are lessons other organizations learned that will help.

Attachments:

List of surgeries performed



For More Information Contact:

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