



THE LIFESAVER SPAY/NEUTER PROGRAM

Project #
FY16-104-MDA
1938

County: **Garrett and Allegany**

Number of Cats Spayed:	110	Number of Dogs Spayed:	94
Number of Cats Neutered:	102	Number of Dogs Neutered:	103

Amount Received: \$38,800	Amount Remaining (to be returned to MDA): \$44.00
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Project Synopsis:

The "Lifesaver Program" targeted low-income pet owners in Garrett and Allegany Counties and proposed to provide no-cost surgeries and rabies vaccinations to 200 dogs and 200 cats.



Project Description:

As is the case with all animal welfare organizations, the number of animals that need help in Western Maryland far exceeds the capacity of those who want to help them. HART for Animals was founded in 2003 in response to the high number of adoptable animals that had to be euthanized due to lack of space and resources. The initial goal was to rescue the animals from the county shelter and transport them to other rescue groups where they could be adopted. However, as time passed, it became clear that rescue alone would not solve the problem: 50% of the animals were still being euthanized and the number of animals continued to increase every year. In 2009, HART opened the region's first low-cost spay/neuter clinic to provide affordable surgeries to pets of low-income residents. The clinic was a success because it offered pet owners an alternative to uncontrolled production of litters. Many of the people who brought their pets to HART's low-cost clinic had never before visited a veterinarian, exposing their animals and their families to parasite infestations and serious diseases, such as rabies.

When the Maryland Spay and Neuter Grants program was announced, HART was one of the first organizations to apply for the program because - thanks to its experience with the low-cost clinic - it was extremely familiar with the region's needs. Garrett and Allegany are among the poorest counties in Maryland and, even with the reduced cost provided by the HART clinic, there were residents who were still not able to sterilize their pets. Those very same people were the ones who would bring their 'surprise' litters to the shelter - where HART would rescue them for transport to other areas. As part of HART's overall plan to ensure the humane treatment of all the region's homeless animals, an accessible spay/neuter program is essential - as has been demonstrated by a decrease of 20% in the animals arriving at the county shelter since HART began its systematic spay/neuter program.

When the HART Animal Center was completed in 2014, HART's low-cost spay/neuter clinic was integrated into the Bredel Veterinary Clinic as two different programs: HARThelp (low-cost surgeries) and Lifesaver, which is



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the no-cost program provided through a grant from the Maryland Department of Agriculture's Spay and Neuter Grants Program. Since HART began in 2009, 5,982 low-cost surgeries and 1,173 no-cost surgeries have been performed.

Summary of Approach:

HART begins the year by publicizing the availability of low-cost and no-cost spay/neuter surgeries in early January 2016. Through a combination of posters, press releases, and public service announcements, HART advertises the program in both counties. Appointments are scheduled on a first-come basis throughout the year, and due to the number of no-shows, clients are being called to confirm the appointment and to remind them of their scheduled appointment. In spite of all efforts, the number of no-shows for the no-cost surgeries is higher than for the low-cost ones. The front-desk staff is of the opinion that the cause is not so much lack of desire to bring their pet but circumstances beyond the pet owner's control, such as lack of money for gas, health problems, and similar difficulties.

Accomplishments:

In 2016, HART performed 409 surgeries under the Maryland Spay and Neuter Grants program. This was a wonderful accomplishment during the year that HART was also completing the construction of its facility: the HART Animal Center. It was a very hectic year because - after 13 years of fundraising - HART finally opened the core of the Center, the animal adoption wing, where animals will be sheltered and prepared for adoption. As a matter of fact, 230 animals were adopted from HART this year by families who came from as far away as Syracuse, NY. Another accomplishment of note has been the change that has occurred in the region with regard to animals and their owners. Through a very active Facebook page, an animal-centered community has become a reality. HART now receives daily requests to post "Lost Animal" announcements, questions about its services, and pleas for help.

Lessons Learned:

The main challenge has been the no-shows, even after multiple changes to the program to ensure compliance with the scheduled appointments. As previously mentioned, they may be due to life circumstances beyond the reach of our organization, such as no money for gas, the weather, etc.. What is extremely challenging is the fact that people are asked if there is any reason that they might not be able to keep appointment and they assure the caller that there is none. And, yet, they fail to arrive for their appointment.

One of the lessons we have taken to heart is that people, regardless of their income, want to be treated with kindness and respect. This is something that has been mentioned to us many times with the words, "We were surprised how well we were treated, even though we didn't have much." We learned a long time ago that we cannot care about the animals we love if we do not care about the people.

A similarly important lesson is the need to keep accurate and meaningful records for everything we do. This is not only essential to provide statistical information to our donors and grantors but it also help us determine whether we are truly making a difference by what we do.

Attachments:

Lists of animals neutered or spayed during calendar year 2016

For More Information Contact:

Name:

Mercedes M. Pellet, Development Director

Organization Name and Address:

HART for Animals
P.O. Box 623, McHenry MD 21541
1265 Bumble Bee Rd., Accident, MD 21520

Email: mercedes@hartforanimals.org



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