



Thurmont Ferals

Project #
FY16-111

County: Frederick

Number of Cats Spayed:	342	Number of Dogs Spayed:	0
Number of Cats Neutered:	258	Number of Dogs Neutered:	0

Amount Received: \$23,736	Amount Remaining (to be returned to MDA): \$0
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Project Synopsis:

Under the Thurmont Ferals grant, Tip Me Frederick (TMF) sterilized and vaccinated 600 feral/community cats; re-homed 37 cats and kittens into barn or indoor homes; and, completed sterilization of six large colonies we had been working on over the past several years.



Project Description:

Thurmont Ferals was a 13-month effort to trap, sterilize, and vaccinate 600 feral and free-roaming cats in northern Frederick County, MD. The project was managed by Tip Me Frederick (TMF), in partnership with Thurmont-based Cuddles Cat Rescue, and Spay Spa & Neuter Nook of Davidsonville, MD. This area was selected because of known concentrations of managed and unmanaged cat colonies spread throughout the region; high incidence of complaint calls received by Frederick County Animal Control (FCAC) and high incidence of intake (greater than 20% of all intake (and subsequent euthanasia) countywide originates from northern Frederick County); and, high incidence of requests for financial assistance for spay/neuter and assistance with feeding feral and free-roaming cat communities received from these areas by TMF, FCAC, and Frederick County Humane Society. We also chose this area because there are very limited resources for residents in northern Frederick County to access to low-cost sterilization/vaccination for feral/free-roaming cats.

Summary of Approach:

Tip Me Frederick (TMF) promoted the program through web, print, social media, and radio channels, as well as reaching out to all known colony caregivers in the region. We developed an on-line application process and reporting system which enabled us to accurately track participation including: names, addresses, and contact information of participants; colony location; number of cats serviced by participant, including sex, age, and identifiable markings; scheduled surgery date; wait time from receipt of application to surgery; total cost/cat including medical needs other than sterilization, vaccination, and ear-tipping; and, unmet needs (names and numbers of participants who could not participate because project was full to capacity). Once an application was received, we contacted applicants to explain program logistics and set up a clinic appointment. All participants received materials on how to trap and transport cats; scheduling information for surgery (date, time, how to prepare cat, what to expect); recovery information; and contact information for TMF project



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coordinators. We worked with Spay Spa & Neuter Nook to schedule monthly clinics of ~55 feline sterilization/vaccination/ear-tips per clinic. TMF called participants with a reminder 2 days before the scheduled appointment and made a follow up call 1 day post-surgery to ensure the cat had recovered and been released. As needed, we provided training in trapping or performed trapping for people who were unable to trap themselves. We also provided transportation from the trap site to the transport pick up site and back if the caregiver was unable to provide for transportation. Cats were transported by van to SSNN where our volunteers waited throughout the day for all cats to recover before loading the cats for transport back to the Frederick pick-up location where caregivers collected their cats.

Accomplishments:

TMF successfully sterilized and vaccinated (for rabies and the distemper combo) 600 cats from across northern Frederick County (actual numbers of cats processed was 607 but 7 cats were found to be already spayed or neutered). We completed sterilization of six large colonies in Thurmont and Emmitsburg which colony caregivers had started over two years ago but were unable to complete due to lack of funds and lack of access to low cost spay/neuter programs. We also successfully re-homed over three dozen cats and kittens who were trapped during clinic trapping events and deemed suitable for adoption into barn homes. More generally, this grant helped solidify TMF's reputation as a professional, reputable TNR resource. As awareness of the grant and TMF's approach spread through word of mouth, through TMF's advertising on social media, and through regular communications with Frederick County Animal Control (FCAC) and Frederick County Humane Society, more and more colony caregivers realized there was finally a resource for them to sterilize their colonies. We also solidified partnerships with cat rescue groups who helped us rehome cats and kittens suitable for adoption. While we are still working with FCAC to determine the statistical impact of this program in terms of lower intake and euthanasia of cats from this region, we have anecdotal evidence which suggests that fewer cats from known colonies in these areas, for whom we performed TNR, are being picked up by FCAC. Additionally, in the spring quarter, we saw less than half the number of pregnant females as recorded in our TNR numbers from this same period in 2015. We are continuing to work with FCAC to revise their intake assessment categories to more precisely characterize cats as "feral" or "semi-feral" vs "stray" and to revise their euthanasia criteria to be more specific since "euthanized for temperament" does not necessarily indicate the cat was feral or semi-feral, i.e. it could merely have been frightened/stressed. This will help FCAC and groups like TMF more accurately measure the impact of TNR programs.

Lessons Learned:

This grant represented TMF's largest grant to date for TNR and as such, we experienced some challenges and learned some important lessons which resulted in changes to our operating protocol. For example, after several clinics where fewer cats were trapped than we planned, we began to over-book clinics so that with the inevitable cancellations and no-shows, we still arrived at ~55 cats per clinic. In a few cases, this strategy backfired and we had 70+ cats at several clinics, but thankfully Spay Spa and Neuter Nook were able to accommodate us. Perhaps the greatest challenge was, and still is, that in addition to grant funds which make access to free sterilization and vaccination possible, we needed more volunteers to both help manage the grant and execute the pre-, day of-, and post-clinic activities. Most notably, we found that we underestimated the number of colony caregivers who would need assistance trapping, as well as needing a place to house the trapped cats overnight. We also underestimated the number of cats who would require medical procedures (umbilical hernias, amputations, etc.) or medications (antibiotics) above the standard drugs for sterilization surgery. TMF does not believe in withholding medical care for an animal in need and so we accepted these costs without passing them along to the caregivers. Fortunately, we were able to work with the MDA to accommodate some of these additional expenses.

Attachments:

Listing of all cats sterilized and vaccinated over the 13-month grant cycle, with associated costs

For More Information Contact:

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