



Community Cats In Newburg And Cobb Island (and surrounding area)

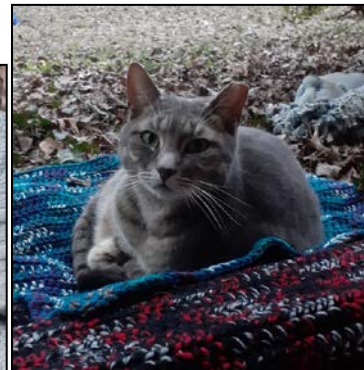
Project #
18-327

County: Charles

Number of Cats Spayed:	115	Number of Dogs Spayed:	n/a
Number of Cats Neutered:	83	Number of Dogs Neutered:	n/a
Amount Received:	13,649.00	Amount Remaining (to be returned to MDA):	\$0

Project Synopsis:

The Community Cats in Newburg and Cobb Island TNR Project was a targeted effort to sterilize 200 free roaming cats in specific areas of the community. This required partnering with a committed caretaker and to provide a safe environment for sterilized animals, who might otherwise be euthanized, and allow the community cats to thrive. Our goals with this program were to: reduce the intake of feral cats at the Humane Society of Charles County and at Tri-County animal shelter; reducing the number of cats euthanized at Tri-County animal shelter; and reduce the population of unwanted kittens produced by feral cats.



Project Description:

The Humane Society of Charles County was established in 1978 with the primary goal of caring for homeless injured animals and continued to grow to support the animals and residents of Charles County and the surrounding area. In 2001, we opened our spay/neuter clinic to the public to allow for low cost surgeries and today we average 2600 surgeries annually (public, shelter, rescue and TNR) and offer low cost Healthy Pet Clinics providing affordable vet care. As an open admission shelter we currently average 2500 animals admitted into our shelter and find new homes for more than 1400 animals annually.

Our Community Cat Project is designed to provide assist a segment of our community who needed a different kind of service from us. The caretakers of Community Cat Colonies love their cats but the exponential reproductive growth rapidly makes them unmanageable. TNR (Trap-Neuter-Return) provides a healthy alternative to stabilize the population of the colony and save lives. The primary shelters that were impacted by this project were our own shelter (The Humane Society of Charles County) and the Tri-County Animal Shelter in Hughesville Maryland. Our shelter's intake of cats is traditionally comprised of 60% stray cats, of which only half could be adopted. Approximately 42% of the stray intakes were transferred to Tri-County Animal Shelter because we could not find homes for them. The Tri-County animal shelter averaged over 4500 per year cat intakes annually with a 46% live release rate due to the vast majority of cats arriving as stray/feral.



In 2016 we began offering TNR services through grant funding that allowed us to assist individual families and colonies who came to us with complaints about increasing amounts of feral cats in their neighborhoods. Through our Forever Friends Community Cat program we would provide persons surrendering stray cats with a TNR option. In just a couple of months between September and December we were able to prevent over 300 intakes into the shelter. Based on these results we designed the Community Cats In Newburg And Cobb Island utilizing community level targeting and followed a complaint based model in order to identify the best caretaker/colonies to focus on for the greatest impact. We initially launched the project in the communities of Newburg, Cobb Island, and Issue based on historical intake data and TNR results from our existing program. The original timeline for the project was 1 year with efforts focused on a narrow area to achieve the maximum effectiveness and projected that the results, seen over an extended period of time, are prevention of future litters that would help us decrease our intakes by 5-10% in the coming years.

Our initial estimates of the potential populations in this area was 200 cats and we had cooperative caretakers onboard from our previous TNR efforts. Our strategy was to focus on a narrow geographic area with the immediate result of TNR 200 cats (adult and juvenile). Unfortunately, our original suppositions had to be revised and the geographic area expanded in order to achieve our objectives. In January, 2019, after requesting several extensions to the project, we requested an expansion to include the communities of 20632 (Faulkner), 20611 (Bel Alton), and 20646 (La Plata). In September, 2019 we added four additional communities: 20677 (Port Tobacco); 20693 (Welcome); 20663 (Nanjemoy); 20640 (Indian Head).

Summary of Approach:

This project employed community level targeting and followed a complaint based model. Some caretakers that had already let us trap in the area and we wished to expand upon this to other colonies throughout Newburg, Cobb Island, and Issue. We planned to focus our trapping efforts in this area beginning in November. At that time, we had capability of trapping up to 8 free roaming cats per surgery day. The cats in identified colonies were planned to be trapped expeditiously, with a goal to alter an entire colony within 2-3 weeks. This maximized the effectiveness of the TNR efforts.

The evening before their surgeries were to be performed, cats were trapped and picked up by the program coordinator and trapper. She used either her own personal transportation or the Humane Society of Charles County Van. They were dropped off early in the morning at the shelters spay/neuter clinic. Cats were then picked up and taken back to the program coordinators home to recover. Once recovered from surgery, they were taken back to the location which they are trapped and released to the field.

Kittens, that were too young to be vaccinated, were kept at the shelter and placed into foster homes to be socialized for adoption. The Humane Society of Charles County has a very large foster program and in 2016 arranged for the fostering of over 200 kittens that were then adopted. If a kitten did not respond well to socialization, upon reaching an age acceptable to be vaccinated, they were spayed/neutered and reintroduced to their colony of origin. Once a colony was completely sterilized, we maintained monthly contact with the caretakers to assess the status of the colony. If new unaltered cats become part of the colony, we returned to the colony to trap and alter any new residents.

Accomplishments:

- The 200 community cats were spayed/neutered, ear-tipped and vaccinated (rabies and FVRCP). There were 115 cats spayed & 83 neutered.
- Impacted colonies in the target area were stabilized in managed colonies with dedicated caretakers.
- Successes provide proof of process approach and facilitated growth and development of project into surrounding target areas with high densities of community cats.
- This project supported and enhanced community awareness in several ways. Residents in the target areas learned about the benefits and options available, when presented with community cats in the area. Humane Society Humane Education programs to the community (including children's programs) highlighted the concept and value of Community Cats and Trap, Neuter, and Return programs to humanely manage their health and population in the community.



-This project integrated well with TNR activities in surrounding areas. These activities were funded by Snyder Grant and some private restricted donations to expand activities to other areas of the county. Additionally, the Snyder grant provided funding for the FVRCP vaccination component for these 200 cats in the Community Cats in Newburg, Issue and Cobb Island TNR Project.

-Since 2016 the total intake of cats at the Humane Society of Charles County has gone down dramatically by 47% by the end of 2019 and the intake of cats at Tricounty is -30% since between 2016-2018 and the Euthanasia rate for cats has gone down -49% in that same time period.

Lessons Learned:

-Strategic geographically isolated target areas does not necessarily mean more effective TNR programs. The limited and restricted locations of the initial target areas of Cobb Island, Issue, and Newburg were in direct competition with larger TNR target populations at the other side of the county. 500-600 cats were TNRd each year in other county locations and those colonies were larger and located in greater population areas (significantly higher demand for services). Complaint based demand within an isolated area is variable and required expansion to a more reasonable target area to efficiently expend the funds and complete the critical target colonies for best value and project efficiency.

-Clearing an entire colony can take more time than expected. Trappers must trap before the 3 available weekly surgery days. In a perfect world, 8 cats can be trapped with each attempt. However that is very rare. There are days where trapping goes on all day and only one or two or no cats are trapped. As the population of unaltered cats is reduced, it becomes more difficult to trap the remaining cats and the last cat may take 2 or 3 trapping attempts.

-Travel time and cost needs to be more realistically calculated and funded. The travel time to the target area was almost 40 miles one way and an hour travel time one way. Volunteers travel to the location, and return with cats to their home. They take cats to surgery and pick up the cats to recover them at home. They return the cats to their colony and return home. In a perfect world for this remote location, this is $(40*2) + (14*2) + (40*2) = 192$ miles per trapping iteration. Volunteer trappers are limited by the size of their personal vehicle. In some cases, the vehicle will only hold 6 traps, so it requires multiple trips to the target location (40 miles away, 2 hour round trip). The funded mileage for this project was inadequate and volunteer trappers were required to absorb the cost of unfunded mileage and personal time at their expense. Unfunded mileage reimbursement is a significant challenge when asking volunteers to trap, transport, recover, and return at their expense and in their personal vehicles for cats that don't belong to them.

-Medical support, in addition to basic spay/neuter & rabies, is an essential part of this program and should be funded as well, as funding from other sources cannot be guaranteed or available. Examples of desired and commonly funded options include some funding for feral medical care (in cases where the cat is injured or has complications), FVRCP vaccine (to prevent Panleukopenia), parasite and miticide treatment, and colony microchip (to facilitate return to colony if surrender to shelter or erroneously trapped by other parties)

-The Maryland MDA Feral program grants are a very important component of reducing cat and kitten intake and euthanasia to our shelter and the county shelter. This program has helped us reduce the population of unwanted cats and kittens in the area. Community cats are allowed to live free and healthy in their respective colonies. This is very important to the caretakers (who love them) and the community where they live.

Attachments:

Complete Project list of animals served

For More Information Contact:

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MARYLAND DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
SPAY AND NEUTER GRANTS PROGRAM

