



Sunshine's 2020 Vision For Feral Spay/Neuter

Project #
20-537

County: Anne Arundel, Howard

Number of Cats Spayed:	137	Number of Dogs Spayed:	0
Number of Cats Neutered:	115	Number of Dogs Neutered:	0

Amount Received: \$12,154.50	Amount Remaining (to be returned to MDA): \$0.00
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Project Synopsis:

This project funded part of our multi-year efforts to control the feral cat population living in colonies in parts of Anne Arundel and Howard counties. We proposed to perform targeted Trap Neuter Return (TNR), spaying/neutering 250 feral cats at 7 colonies (2 in Anne Arundel and 5 in Howard) in order to reduce the intake and euthanasia rates at those 2 county shelters.



Project Description:

There are numerous colonies of community cats within our operating area and we have already targeted and completed some of them in previous years. This year's grant allowed us to increase our efforts and results by covering other colonies where we have received requests for help with TNR from residents or in consultation with county animal control officials.

This project, which ran from October 2019 to July 2020 (including a period of suspended operations during the early part of the COVID-19 pandemic), sought to spay/neuter 250 feral cats living in 7 distinct colonies. The two colonies in Anne Arundel county were in residential neighborhoods in Glen Burnie. In Howard county, three of the colonies were in industrial/retail areas, while the other two were in housing areas with a high number of transient residents. Most colonies had dedicated caregivers; where there were only feeders we trained them to be full caregivers.

The project funded the cost of the spay/neuter surgeries and rabies vaccines for the feral cats and included a transportation component to bring the animals from the trapping sites to our partner vets' clinics.

Summary of Approach:

We started long before the grant was awarded with outreach to caregivers and property managers to determine the scope of the problem and to determine priorities. We planned to take on one colony at a time and after it was 100% complete to move on to the next. Before moving on to each site, our coordinator lined up volunteers,



trappers, equipment, and transportation while one of our directors scheduled veterinary clinics to ensure they could handle as many as 15 cats on each trapping day. We established a rhythm of trapping, neutering, returning two times per week in order to optimize resources and keep a regular schedule.

When we trapped, any cats with eartips indicating they had already been spayed/neutered were released if in good health; all others were taken to our vet the next morning. Following surgery, the cats recuperated and were evaluated for potential rehoming through our adoption programs. Cats that were truly feral were returned to the site and reintegrated with the colony. We trapped at each site until we achieved 100% and then continued our outreach activities for follow-up monitoring to catch any stragglers or newcomers.

We partnered with three geographically separated spay/neuter vet clinics to provide services through an in-kind contribution in the form of substantially discounted rates. Our organization also funded any additional vaccines, medical care, and flea treatment not covered by the grant.

Accomplishments:

In just 8 months of the planned one-year project, we managed to spay/neuter 252 feral cats and bring all 7 targeted colonies under control. Once the grant money was expended, we continued to fund the last few cats at the colonies and check for newcomers to ensure each remained 100% complete. We also provided additional treatment and/or surgery to any cat that needed it and cared for them until fully recovered.

While we were weathering the COVID-19 epidemic we only trapped critical cats (injured/sick, very pregnant, or those nursing kittens). Although we could not have the trapped cats spayed/neutered, there was a silver lining to the dark cloud: with so many people working from home, we had many come forward to volunteer as fosters. They held onto the trapped cats, several of which had kittens, until vet care was available again. Many of the cats that were put into our expanded foster network ended up being socialized and adopted by their fosters who benefitted as much for giving care as the cats did.

Lessons Learned:

We increased the number of feral cats that we spayed/neutered by about 40% over last year's projects by ramping up our boots-on-the-ground and social networking outreach activities early in the project. Fortunately, we were about 75% complete when the COVID-19 pandemic hit. Since we were ahead of schedule the drastic cut back in physical activities and shifting to virtual ones did not impact us nearly as hard as it could have.

Despite this, restrictions on spay/neuter activities due to COVID-19 severely impacted all of our programs. When spay/neuter surgeries were declared non-essential, we had to effectively shut down all vet visits except for emergencies. Once the restrictions were lifted, there was a traffic jam at the vets as they found themselves overwhelmed by kitten season and the backlog of surgeries that they needed to work through. Our vet partners scheduled longer hours and held special weekend spay/neuter clinics just for rescue organizations in order to catch up with the pent-up demand. Things are finally beginning to stabilize at a new normal.

Attachments:

List of feral cats altered

For More Information Contact:

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MARYLAND DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
SPAY AND NEUTER GRANTS PROGRAM

