

2013

No More Homeless Pets[®] National Conference
Playbook



No-Kill Community:
What Worked, What Didn't,
What's Next

**Jacksonville,
Florida**



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THEM
ALL™**

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Community: Jacksonville, Florida

Key participants in helping the community to become no-kill:

- One major animal welfare partner: First Coast No More Homeless Pets
- One major humane society: Jacksonville Humane Society
- One major municipal shelter: Jacksonville Animal Care and Protective Services

Introduction

When it comes to saving animals in Jacksonville, Florida, the top priority for over a decade has been spay and neuter programs. Recently, animal welfare advocates there have realized they can accomplish a lot more working together than working alone. Three of the largest Jacksonville organizations and agencies — First Coast No More Homeless Pets (FCNMHP), the Jacksonville Humane Society and Jacksonville Animal Care and Protective Services — partner with each other on a number of lifesaving programs, including programs to save animals who need medical and behavioral help to get adopted, a kitten nursery and joint adoption events.

One of their biggest collaborations is Feral Freedom, a trap/neuter/return program that is saving the lives of thousands of community cats (free-roaming feral, stray and lost cats) each year. Funded in part by Best Friends Animal Society, Feral Freedom has been so successful in keeping cats out of shelters (and consequently saving their lives) that it's being adopted by other communities across the country.



FCNMHP executive director Rick DuCharme, Jacksonville Humane Society executive director Denise Deisler and Jacksonville Animal Care and Protective Services division chief Scott Trebatoski meet regularly to monitor the progress of the programs, study shelter statistics and plan courses of action that will save even more lives. They also communicate with other animal welfare group partners in their mission to make Jacksonville a no-kill community.

“Collaboration in Jacksonville is so seamless that we rarely duplicate services and programs,” Scott says. “We utilize each other’s skills to move programs to where they become more efficient and effective. It is primarily why we have been able to make huge gains in short periods of time.”

Denise says the secret to working together is having everyone focused on reaching the same goals. “That pushes egos aside and allows us to focus on lifesaving,” she says. “We save more lives by expanding upon and complementing programs that work, regardless of the host agency. Equally important is it keeps us from being redundant and wasting precious resources. We also pool resources to tackle new, emerging issues that we may not have budgeted for.”

Denise says a perfect example of this is the kitten nursery called Kitten University. “I had the facility space, cages and med team, but no money for meds,” she says. “Rick had the money for meds and equipment, and Scott had the kittens. Together, we were able to open a kitten nursery and save more than 500 kittens the first year.” And looking at the larger picture, Rick says, “The only way we can ever reach a time of No More Homeless Pets is through extensive collaboration among local groups in all communities.”

The three organizations aim to make Duval County a no-kill community no later than 2014. They’re well on their way. The average annual save rate at Jacksonville Animal Care and Protective Services (JACPS) is currently 83 percent, but for two months in fall of 2012, the shelter saved 92.1 percent of all dogs, cats, puppies and kittens that came through its doors. (A save rate of 90 percent or more is generally considered the threshold for a community to achieve no-kill status.)



Rick DuCharme

Here's a bit more about these three organizations and the people who run them.

First Coast No More Homeless Pets: First Coast No More Homeless Pets started back in 2002 with Rick DuCharme and a few volunteers meeting around his kitchen table in Jacksonville. Today, the organization has more than 60 employees, an adoption center and one of the largest spay/neuter facilities in the nation.

In the year before Rick founded FCNMHP, almost 34,000 cats and dogs entered Duval County shelters and more than 23,000 of them were killed. To Rick, a former heavy equipment businessman and longtime animal welfare advocate, that was simply unacceptable. Rick knew that as the number of spay/neuter surgeries increase, kill rates decrease. So he created First Coast No More Homeless Pets with a mission to eliminate the killing of dogs and cats in the Jacksonville community through free and low-cost spay and neuter programs.

One of the first programs that FCNMHP developed was SpayJax, a city-funded free spay/neuter program for dogs and cats that is available to pet parents who are struggling financially. Following SpayJax, SpayNassau was developed, along with two other low-cost programs. In 2006, FCNMHP developed a trap/neuter/return program to offer low-cost spay and neuter surgeries for feral and other free-roaming cats.

In August 2008, the Feral Freedom program was born. In its first year alone, there was a 50 percent reduction in shelter cat deaths in Jacksonville. The program saves approximately 5,000 cats per year. This model program has been so successful at saving lives that it has been adopted by other cities across the country.

FCNMHP opened a state-of-the-art high-volume spay/neuter and wellness clinic in 2009 and now averages 2,000 spay/neuter surgeries every month.

For more than 10 years, FCNMHP has provided low-cost and expert care to hundreds of thousands of animals in need. With the support of the community, the organization has created effective and humane programs to combat overpopulation and the needless killing of pets. In addition to FCNMHP's wonderful spay/neuter programs, the organization offers adoption and other types of programs to keep pets in their homes and out of shelters.

FCNMHP programs seem to be working. By 2012, the number of animals dying in Duval County shelters had dropped to slightly more than 5,000, a reduction of 78 percent. Today, FCNMHP continues to be one of the key players in the mission to make Jacksonville a no-kill community.

Jacksonville Humane Society: According to its website, the Jacksonville Humane Society provides care, comfort and compassion to animals in need while engaging the hearts, hands and minds of the community to bring about an end to the killing of abandoned and orphaned shelter animals. JHS is funded by individual donations, wills and bequests, and money received from shelter services.

The Jacksonville Humane Society was established in 1885 as the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. In 1920, the SPCA was reorganized as the Humane Society. The Humane Society's president, Flora Bowden, and her husband, Richard, donated 12 acres of land and the first shelter was opened on this property in 1924 as the Humane Society's Rest Farm. In 1958, it was renamed the Jacksonville Humane Society, and in 1993, a facility expansion increased capacity to approximately 400 animals.

In 2005, JHS made the transition from being an open-admission shelter to being a limited intake, no-kill shelter, allowing JHS to focus time and resources on the lifesaving aspects of shelter care, including providing medical care for shelter animals, transferring ill and injured animals from the city shelter, providing training and behavior modification, and providing counseling and education to help people keep their pets instead of surrendering them.

In 2007, a fire tore through the JHS facilities, claiming the lives of 19 dogs and 67 cats, though, miraculously, 80 animals were saved that day. Thanks to the quick help of volunteers, staff members and others in the community, JHS was able to start accepting animals again within a week of the tragedy. Over the next few months, temporary modular housing and administrative areas were established, and JHS was once again fully operational.

JHS has approximately 400 to 450 animals in its adoption center at any given time and finds homes for about 5,000 animals a year. Every week, staff from JHS meet with Jacksonville Animal Care and Protective Services staff and bring animals from the shelter back to the adoption center.

Denise Deisler came on board as the executive director of JHS in 2011. She immediately built bridges and developed productive partnerships; increased revenue while reducing expenses; recruited an energetic, talented and enthusiastic board; and implemented new initiatives that contribute significantly to the community's no-kill goal. New programs, including a kitten nursery and a renewed focus on transfers from the city's shelter, resulted in an additional 1,000 lives saved in her first year alone.

Jacksonville Animal Care and Protective Services: Between 16,000 and 20,000 animals come to the city shelter each year, and 46 percent of them come across the intake counter. The city-funded shelter has a \$3 million annual budget that funds field and shelter operations as well as other programs the shelter provides.

Prior to 2001, little attention was paid to the City of Jacksonville Animal Control (as Jacksonville Animal Care and Protective Services was then called), according to a case study on Duval County written by Rick DuCharme. Each year, shelter admissions and deaths were increasing, and nothing was being done to change it. But then a couple of influential individuals started to put behind-the-scenes pressure on the mayor to make improvements at animal control.



Thanks to their efforts, a new professional director was hired, a new off-site adoption center was opened, and a mayor's task force was established to suggest recommendations to move the department forward. In addition, the name of the shelter was changed to Jacksonville Animal Care and Control (and later to Jacksonville Animal Care and Protective Services).

Many great things sprang from that task force. Money was set aside and plans were put in place for a new city shelter, the possibility of no-kill animal services was publicly discussed and public funding for targeted spay/neuter was made available. FCNMHP and many long-term relationships were formed, according to Rick's report. The task force was also the first time true collaboration among the local animal organizations was attempted.

In the fall of 2008, Scott Trebatoski came on board as the shelter's new division chief. Scott, an animal control professional with a master's degree in business administration and private business experience, is known for his innovative approach to old problems. He came to the animal welfare field by way of public animal control and has more than a dozen years in the field. He has been a director with the Florida Animal Control Association (FACA) for eight years and rewrote the State of Florida certification course, manual and exams for animal control officers. He was recognized by FACA in 2005-06 and 2011-12 for running the best agency in two different locations in Florida.

When he came to JACPS in 2008, the municipal shelter still had some hills to climb. "I came to Jacksonville when it was just beginning to move forward from hitting its low point," Scott says. "Euthanasia was around 80 percent to 90 percent and morale was nonexistent. People warned me that it was career suicide to take on the problems."

But Scott is not one to back down from a challenge, and it's a good thing he didn't. He says, "In a very short time — approximately two years — we cut euthanasia by 50 percent and only four years into my tenure of engaging staff to make a difference, we are saving 83 percent, with continuing increases each year."



Targeted spay/neuter programs

FCNMHP's targeted spay/neuter programs identify segments of the community (geographic, demographic or animal specific) that have a critical need for free and low-cost spay/neuter services based on factors such as shelter intake and kill data.

In 2002, FCNMHP's first year, it introduced SpayJax, a free high-volume pet sterilization program targeting low-income people with pets. Within months, the city shelter experienced a decrease in admissions. That same year, Jacksonville Animal Care and Control, as it was then called, and the Jacksonville Humane Society began performing sterilizations on animals before adoption instead of adopting out pets with spay/neuter vouchers.

Since it was so successful, the SpayJax program was expanded to include Nassau and Clay counties. SpayWest, a targeted free spay/neuter program for Nassau County residents living in low-income zip codes, was also born, as well as a free spay/neuter program for pit bull terriers and mixes that's available to low-income residents in Duval, Nassau and Clay counties. Target 32210 offers free spay/neuter services to Duval County residents living in the 32210 zip code. In 2006, FCNMHP developed a trap/neuter/return program to offer low-cost spay and neuter surgeries for feral and other free-roaming cats. In the first six years of these programs, shelter admissions dropped 30 percent and shelter deaths decreased by 50 percent.

In 2009, FCNMHP opened a state-of-the-art high-volume spay/neuter and wellness clinic and now averages 2,000 spay/neuter surgeries every month. "We have a high enough volume in our spay/neuter clinic that we can easily reach our targeted program goals and still perform low-cost surgeries for the general public," Rick says.

WHAT WORKED:

- **Doing the homework:** Researching and studying shelter intake and kill statistics is critical because it helps to determine what areas are most in need of free spay/neuter services.
- **Low-cost pricing:** FCNMHP provides surgeries at low cost, but at a high enough price that they still make a profit for the organization. This income is used to subsidize the organization's targeted free services.
- **Marketing:** It's important to get the word out to the community that free and low-cost spay/neuter services are available.

WHAT DIDN'T:

- **Depending on one funding source:** The SpayJax program was funded from the city's general budget, and for the first four years was funded at \$250,000 per year, allowing 4,000-plus low-income targeted surgeries. Then, for several years, funding dropped to \$150,000, which resulted in a 50 percent drop in surgery volume and more animals entering the city shelter. In 2008-09, FCNMHP was able to provide \$150,000 in private funding to match the city funding, allowing the number of surgeries to increase to 4,500 annually. The very next year, shelter admissions were down again — by 7 to 10 percent.

WHAT'S NEXT:

- **Expansion:** FCNMHP plans to expand its targeted spay/neuter programs to other communities.
- **Increase in the number of surgeries:** FCNMHP wants to increase free and low-cost spay/neuter surgeries from 25,000 to 32,000 per year.



Feral Freedom

One of the keys to bringing about a time of No More Homeless Pets is reducing the number of cats currently dying in shelters, Rick says in “Save Lives with Feral Freedom,” a guide he wrote about the Feral Freedom program with assistance from Best Friends Animal Society. In most communities, at least 50 percent of the animals entering shelters are cats and only three out of every 10 cats get out of those shelters alive. And in some shelters, only one in 10 cats survives.

Feral Freedom is a trap/neuter/return program for community cats — free-roaming, stray or feral cats who live outside and don’t belong to anybody. The model program is the brainchild of a man named Ebenezer Gujjarlapudi, Jacksonville’s director of environmental compliance who was appointed interim chief of Animal Care and Protective Services in 2008. An engineer by trade without animal welfare experience, Ebenezer began researching all aspects of animal sheltering, seeking practical solutions to the feral cat problem.

Under Ebenezer’s leadership, a new policy was introduced: Community cats would no longer be killed in the city shelter. Instead, they would be turned over to FCNMHP, which would sterilize, vaccinate and ear-tip them and then return them to their territories. In the past, these cats would have been held in the shelter for the mandatory holding period and then killed, all at taxpayers’ expense.

In August 2008, the first feral cats were transferred from the city shelter to FCNMHP and were spayed or neutered and then returned to their territories alive. More than 5,000 cats were saved in the program’s first year alone. Since its beginning, Feral Freedom has saved the lives of more than 19,000 cats.

A partnership between FCNMHP and Duval County, in collaboration with Best Friends Animal Society and the Jacksonville Humane Society, Feral Freedom has become “the most efficient and effective way to quickly reduce shelter deaths,” Rick says. Here are the specifics on how it works:

1. Residents rent humane traps from JACPS to trap “nuisance” cats.
2. Trapped cats are brought to JACPS by residents or picked up from residents and transported by animal control officers. Basic information about each cat is obtained to assist in determining the cat’s final disposition and in returning community cats to their territories.
3. Each cat is put through the regular admission process and admitted to the shelter. At that time, the cat is evaluated for the Feral Freedom program based on the information and inspection of the cat.
4. Cats destined for the Feral Freedom program are sent to an isolation room and remain in their traps.

Information about each cat, including the location where the cat was trapped, is written on the cage card attached to the trap.

5. Cats are transported twice a day to FCNMHP. They never remain at the shelter longer than four hours.
6. Cats are sterilized, vaccinated for rabies and FVRCP (feline viral rhinotracheitis, calicivirus and pan-leukopenia), treated for fleas and ear mites if needed, and ear-tipped while under anesthesia.
7. Cats are kept overnight and given a meal both that evening and the next morning before being returned to their territories.
8. Door hangers explaining the program are left at the homes surrounding the area where the cats are released.

Feral Freedom has been so successful in saving lives that it has expanded to Nassau and Duval counties, as well as to other communities across the nation.

WHAT WORKED:

- **Communication among the parties involved:** What worked extremely well with the implementation of Feral Freedom was the seamless communication between the program director and the chief of animal care over the details of the program and the challenges that occurred throughout the process, Scott says. He says flexibility to adapt the program is also important.
- **Support:** Feral Freedom has the absolute support of upper management, the mayor and the city council.
- **Directing complaints about the program to one person:** It's critical to make sure that everyone gets a consistent message about the program's purpose and policies.
- **An "all in" approach:** Scott says he has seen programs falter that simply dabble in TNR. Feral Freedom is a better model, he explains, because all eligible community cats are put through the TNR process, which has had a major impact: a 22 percent reduction in cat intake in Jacksonville.

WHAT DIDN'T:

- **Publicizing the program early on:** "What didn't work is proactive education and media while the program was getting started," Scott says. "While education sounds like it would be positive, all it did was drive the anti-TNR people to become vocal without paying attention to the facts." How did they remedy this problem? Scott says, "We did 'Don't ask, don't tell,' meaning we wouldn't proactively discuss Feral Freedom, including on TV shows. But if asked questions, we would be 100 percent honest one-on-one with people."

WHAT'S NEXT:

- **Expanding the program:** Helping other communities across the nation implement their own Feral Freedom programs.
- **Supplementing the program:** Plans are being discussed to supplement the Feral Freedom program with a publicly funded cat sterilization program that would be open to everyone regardless of income level.



Low-cost veterinary care

In 2009, FCNMHP opened one of the largest spay/neuter clinics in the country. The clinic performs more than 25,000 spay/neuter surgeries a year, more than half of which are targeted. The clinic also offers other low-cost veterinary care. Since its opening, the clinic has treated more than 50,000 animals in need at a reasonable price. Money made from clinic services helps subsidize FCNMHP's targeted spay/neuter efforts.

Jacksonville Humane Society opened up its low-cost Community Animal Hospital in 2012. It set up a charitable fund to cover clients who could not afford to pay even the low fees offered. When it comes to creating a no-kill community, low-cost veterinary services are essential because they help keep pets in their homes by providing access to services to those who can't afford veterinary care through conventional means.

WHAT WORKED:

- **Creative funding sources:** FCNMHP found funding for the purchase and remodeling of the building that now houses its clinic from a number of sources. Funding came from a combination of a low-interest loan and grant from the city to bring jobs to an economically depressed area, a mortgage from a local bank, a mortgage from a board member, and large donations from board members and local philanthropists. It was a complicated package, but it enabled FCNMHP to get its clinic up and running. Getting creative and proactive around fundraising is essential, Rick says.
- **Appointment flexibility:** An appointment-based system works well, but a clinic must leave "white space" open for emergencies and urgent walk-ins, Denise says.

WHAT DIDN'T:

- **Not doing appointments:** FCNMHP found out quickly that just taking walk-ins caused chaos. It now does appointments.

WHAT'S NEXT:

- **Continuing to provide care:** Both FCNMHP and Jacksonville Humane Society will continue to provide low-cost veterinary care to those who need it.



Kitten University

One day in the spring of 2012, Denise, Rick and Scott were poring over shelter statistics when they noticed that a high percentage of the animals being killed at the shelter were kittens. Though kittens are among the most easily placed of pets, kittens too young to be adopted are at great risk of being killed in shelters because they require a great deal of care.

So Denise, Rick and Scott decided to start a kitten nursery. Denise had the facility space, Rick had money for medicine and equipment, and Scott had the kittens. The nursery, originally called K-Paws and now called Kitten University, saved more than 500 kittens its first year alone. Funded in part by Best Friends Animal Society, Kitten University is on track to save more than 1,100 kittens in 2013.

Diverting “bottle babies” (those needing to be bottle-fed) to foster care and reserving Kitten University space for two- to eight-week-old kittens allows Kitten University to save even more kittens. People seeking to turn in unweaned kittens are offered a bottle baby kit with all the supplies they need to provide care until the kittens are weaned. As soon as the kittens are weaned, Kitten University will take them in if necessary.

Kitten University is a real hit in the Jacksonville community. Media coverage helps bring in lots of volunteers, as well as donors who gave to the program through a “baby shower” held at local big-box retailers. The program staff hold “graduation parties” to facilitate the adoption of kittens saved through the nursery. Rick says that Kitten University has been another successful component of Jacksonville’s efforts to decrease shelter admissions.

WHAT WORKED:

- **Partnering on the program:** By pooling their resources, Jacksonville Humane Society, FCNMHP and JACPS were able to create a wonderful lifesaving program that they couldn’t have created on their own.
- **Having enough nursery caregivers:** Having enough volunteers and staff is essential to the success of Kitten University.
- **Getting foster volunteers:** Getting people in the community to foster very young kittens frees up space in the nursery to care for more kittens.
- **Getting media coverage:** Stories about Kitten University in the local newspapers and on the evening news help draw in more volunteers and donors.

WHAT DIDN’T:

- **Relying solely on volunteers to staff the nursery:** “A 24/7 operation that relied on volunteers did not work,” Denise says. “You must have core staffing augmented by volunteers.”

WHAT’S NEXT:

- **Continuing the program:** Kitten nurseries are new, innovative programs and much has been learned since Kitten University was established in April 2012, Denise says. They plan to continue to learn, grow and make changes.



Getting more pets adopted

If a shelter is a pleasant place to be, more animals will be adopted. “Make it so people want to spend time in the shelter,” Scott says. “The longer they are in the shelter, the more likely that they will fall in love with some animal even if it isn’t what they originally came to adopt.”

At Jacksonville Humane Society, good marketing and customer service have resulted in increased adoption numbers, Denise says. And at JACPS, the group cat rooms have helped adoptions. “If you keep the grouping to three or four cats, there are a number of times that people will adopt the entire group together,” Scott says. “We have used the incentive of giving them the enrichment tools we kept with the cats if they adopt the whole group.” The FCNMHP Adoption Center, sponsored by Best Friends Animal Society, opened in October 2011. In its first year, more than 1,000 pets found new homes.

Joint adoption events are another effective way to help more animals find homes. Because many animal groups are involved, the events take some planning and can be expensive to pull off, but the results are worth it. Denise says these large joint adoption events demonstrate animal welfare groups’ commitment to partnering. Since these events draw a different audience than those who come to the shelter, Scott says they haven’t had a negative impact on shelter adoptions.

In July 2013, Jacksonville hosted its second annual mega adoption weekend and more than 1,000 pets from rescue groups and the city shelter found homes.

WHAT WORKED:

- **Having groups on the same page:** To ensure a smooth adoption process, all the groups participating in joint adoption events should have uniform paperwork, pricing, rules and expectations, Scott says.
- **Good publicity:** These events need to be advertised to draw in large numbers of potential adopters.

WHAT DIDN’T:

- **Poor planning:** Participating groups must prepare for what they want to accomplish and make sure they have enough staff and volunteers to work at the event.

WHAT’S NEXT:

- **More events:** Jacksonville plans to increase the number of large joint adoption events to four or five a year.



Keeping pets in homes and out of shelters

Working at the admissions desk at JACPS, First Coast No More Homeless Pets has a full-time person whose sole job is to help people find alternatives to relinquishing their pets to the shelter. JACPS also has three city employees working the desk to assist with intake and pet retention.

People surrender their pets to shelters for many reasons. In these tough economic times, some people feel that they can no longer afford to care for their pets. Others have pets with behavior problems and they don't know how to deal with them. Jacksonville has a number of resources to help keep these pets in their homes with their families.

Besides low-cost veterinary clinics (mentioned above), there are food banks to help people struggling financially. FCNMHP opened up the Jacksonville Pet Food Bank in March 2010 and has distributed hundreds of thousands of pounds of pet food to qualified low-income families whose pets are spayed or neutered. (Families who qualify for free food also qualify for free spay/neuter services.) The Jacksonville Pet Food Bank is run by volunteers and relies almost solely on community donations. "I think this provides help to lots of people who might not be able to keep their pets otherwise," Rick says. JACPS partners with the local Meals on Wheels program to deliver pet food to people with pets who receive meals from the program.

Another way that FCNMHP helps those having financial difficulties is by partnering with the Sulzbacher Center, which provides shelter for the homeless, many of whom have pets. FCNMHP arranges for temporary foster care for pets while their families are getting back on their feet. And Pet Haven is a FCNMHP program for pets whose people have died. FCNMHP will take in the pets and care for them until new homes can be found.

To help people with pet behavior problems, Jacksonville Humane Society operates a Pet Behavior Helpline that provides tools, resources and referrals to assist pet owners in all aspects of care and to find solutions to keep them from surrendering their pets to a shelter. The helpline has a 25 to 35 percent success rate at getting folks to work through their pets' behavior issues or collaborate with JHS to re-home them rather than admitting them to a shelter. JHS also offers several dog training classes, including a class for puppies, a dog manners class and a Canine Good Citizen class.