


Partner Up: How the Public and Private Sectors Work Together to Help Community Cats (Shelly Kotter, Christopher Romero)



About Us

Shelly Kotter

- Community cat program manager, Best Friends Animal Society
- 16 years with Best Friends Animal Society
- Manages several CCPs around the country

Christopher Romero

- Lieutenant in the Field Services Division of the Albuquerque Animal Welfare Department
- Supervises 25 employees, most of them animal control officers



Overview

- Today's presentation
 - Best Friends community cat programs
 - Traditional approach to community cat management
 - A new approach: SNR and TNR
 - The Community Cats Projects
 - Success stories
 - Resources
 - Q&A



Best Friends Community Cat Programs



Best Friends CCPs

- Ongoing
 - Four Directions (southern Utah, northern Arizona)
 - Los Angeles Free Fix
 - DeKalb County, Georgia



Community Cats Projects

- Three-year Community Cats Projects*
 - San Antonio, Texas (2012)
 - Albuquerque, New Mexico (2012)
 - Baltimore, Maryland (2013)
 - Columbus, Georgia (2014)
 - Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (2014)
 - Pima County, Arizona (2014)

*Partnership with PetSmart Charities™





Traditional Approach to Community Cat Management



Traditional Approach

- Approach
 - Rounding up community cats and taking them to shelters
 - Filling our shelters with unadoptable cats
 - Killing >70% of all cats entering the shelters
 - Killing friendly cats for space
 - Killing kittens from the same mothers over and over again
 - Spending tax dollars on this endless cycle



Traditional Approach

- Impact
 - **Not** impacting the population
 - **Not** addressing nuisance concerns
 - **Not** stopping the flow of cats entering shelters
 - **Not** making a difference in the health and welfare of the community or the cats



A New Approach: SNR and TNR



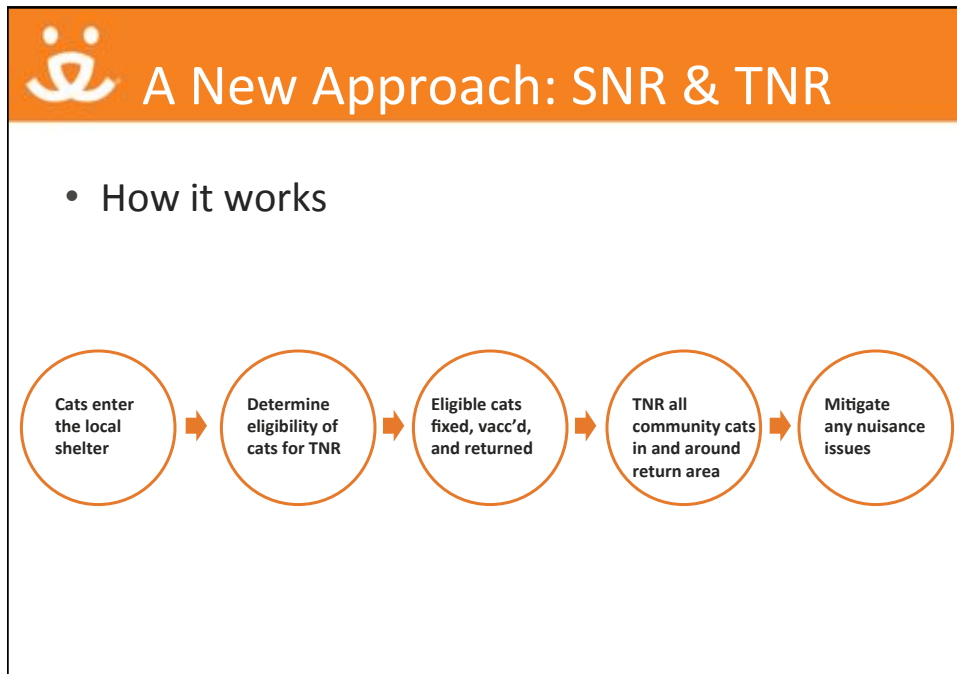
A New Approach: SNR and TNR

- SNR (shelter/neuter/return)
 - Shelter cats are the low-hanging fruit
 - Saving them affects killing from day one
 - Shelter cats are “red flag” cats for TNR efforts
 - Identifies caregivers and complainants



A New Approach: SNR and TNR

- Targeted TNR (trap/neuter/return)
 - Field cats are the bigger challenge
 - They are the future intake cats
 - Sterilizing these cats is going to affect the intake rate
 - Also addresses nuisance complaints
 - Targeted approach
 - High intake locations: targeting ZIP codes
 - Areas with a high volume of complainants
 - Working closely with ACOs on cases





Community Cats Projects

- Public-private partnerships
 - City or county funding allocated to humane management of community cats
 - Support from national nonprofit organizations
 - Best Friends Animal Society
 - PetSmart Charities™



Community Cats Projects

- Public-private partnerships
 - Buy-in from key stakeholders
 - Public health department
 - Shelter and enforcement staff
 - Spay/neuter clinics
 - TNR and rescue groups
 - Public
 - And others





Community Cats Projects

- More than just TNR
 - Focused TNR efforts are the core
 - Additional lifesaving programs
 - Adoptions for kittens and adoptable adults
 - Foster programs
 - More (e.g., ACCT Philly's Safe at Home program)



Community Cats Projects

- How they work
 - Cats enter the shelter via ACO or resident
 - Eligible cats are transferred to the project
 - Sterilized
 - Vaccinated (rabies and distemper)
 - Treated for parasites
 - Treated for any other injuries and illnesses, as needed
 - Ear-tipped
 - Held for recovery; intake information logged in database
 - They are returned to their outdoor homes



Community Cats Projects

- How they work
 - In the field
 - Door hangers or door knocking on the block where the cats were trapped
 - Follow-up to ensure that all the cats in that area are identified for spay/neuter
 - Work with feeders to become better caregivers



Community Cats Projects

- Shelter accommodations
 - Housing additional cats
 - Reorganize intake area
 - Use hallways, as necessary
 - Office trailer
 - Medical care
 - Expand surgical capacity
 - Vaccinate upon intake
 - Volunteers to support surgery, recovery, etc.



Community Cats Projects

- Shelter accommodations
 - Integration with CCP
 - Speaking to the public at intake
 - Cat-related calls are referred to CCP staff



Community Cats Projects

- Concerns
 - Strays going right back out:
How will owners find them?
 - RTO rate is only about 2%, so better chance of getting home if returned to location where found
 - Reduced euthanasia and need for space: more opportunities for positive outcomes
 - Healthy and in good condition: assume cats have food, water and shelter



Community Cats Projects

- Concerns
 - Friendly cats and kittens: feel sorry for them
 - Goal: have space to hold them for adoption, but for now, it's unnecessary to euthanize others to make room for them
 - They have a home already
 - More space and time to hold others who can't be returned (declawed, blind, etc.)
 - Once we turn this around, more space will be available



Community Cats Projects

- Advance groundwork
 - Ordinances and laws favorable to TNR and SNR
 - Support of key stakeholders
 - Health department
 - City council, county commission
 - Municipal animal shelter
 - Shelter clinic with capacity to grow
 - High-volume spay/neuter providers
 - Others (e.g., TNR and rescue groups)



Community Cats Projects

- Working with stakeholders
 - Spay/neuter clinics
 - Quality care
 - Capacity
 - Location
 - Pre- and post-op holding
 - Spay package details
 - Surgery
 - Vaccines
 - Ear tip



Community Cats Projects

- Working with stakeholders
 - Spay/neuter clinics
 - Cost
 - Up-charges
 - Eye removal
 - Amputation (leg or tail)
 - URI treatment
 - Cryptorchid





Community Cats Projects

- Working with stakeholders
 - Enforcement/field officers
 - Programs without ACO support
 - Unaware of past or chronic nuisance complaints or other problems (e.g., hoarding situations)
 - ACOs can offer no alternative to traditional impound and euthanasia
 - Unable to target high-intake locations with prevention (TNR)



Community Cats Projects

- Working with stakeholders
 - Enforcement/field officers
 - Programs with ACO support
 - Ability to work with complainants and caregivers
 - Help with educating the public about TNR
 - » ACOs are the largest community outreach team where animal issues are concerned
 - Able to target high-intake locations
 - Support in the field
 - » Hoarding situations




Community Cats Projects

- Best Friends teams
 - Located at shelter
 - Work closely with shelter and enforcement staff
 - Work with caregivers
 - Work with complainants
 - Track project data, stats
 - Transport cats
 - Work with spay/neuter clinics
 - Host events



Success Stories

 **Success Stories**

- Albuquerque
 - Since February of 2012
 - More than 11,000 sterilized and vaccinated cats
 - More than 75% came from community calls, not the shelter
 - Overall intake of cats and kittens declined 35%
 - Shelter death rate dropped 89%
 - Intake of kittens under 8 weeks of age dropped 35% compared to baseline
 - A strong indication that the program is reducing the population of community cats

 **Success Stories**

- Save rates for our shelter-based CCPs:
2015 fiscal year to date
 - Albuquerque, N.M. (88.8%)
 - San Antonio, Texas (83%)
 - Baltimore, Md. (81.1%)
 - DeKalb County, Ga. (97%)
 - St. George, Utah (96.9%)
 - Pima County, Ariz. (88.5%)





Before TNR

- New Mexico law requires that animal shelters dispose of a cat in one of four ways:
 1. Return to the owner
 2. Adoption
 3. Release to a rescue group
 4. Humanely euthanize
- Albuquerque municipal shelters were killing 72% percent of cats being impounded. Several thousand a year were being killed because they were labeled feral.
- The number one reason for killing cats was the label of feral.



Before TNR and SNR

THE BEGINNING OF THE END

- Intake
- Processing and evaluation (is it fair?)
- Stray cattery (overpopulation)





Before TNR and SNR

- Cage tossing
- The cold metal cart with a squeaky wheel
- The bright cold room
- The net
- The needle
- The freezer
- The landfill



Before TNR and SNR

- Compassion fatigue (specifically, your veterinary and kennel staff)
- Field response times
 - In many instances, officers were making repeat calls to numerous addresses. In one case, more than 100 cats were picked up at the same address in a few years' time. This was evidence that population control and nuisance behaviors (spraying, fighting and noise) had not improved.



Before TNR and SNR

- Adoptions and reclaims
 - Volunteer, kennel and veterinary staff were using personnel and other resources to care for and treat feral cats.
- Medical issues
 - Our biggest medical challenge was treating diseases associated with stress and overcrowding, such as URIs. The crowding caused by 3,000 feral cats per year was a contributing factor to house cats being killed.



After





After

- In 2008, Jim Ludwick, the City of Albuquerque's animal welfare department program analyst, started looking for a solution to Albuquerque's overpopulation of street cats.
- Mr. Ludwick recommended that the city participate in a broad-based community effort to spay or neuter street cats as a means of population control. This was the turning point for TNR in the community.
- In 2012, Best Friends Animal Society started conducting TNR in the city. This allowed spay/neuter flexibility and a paid staff person to do TNR.



After

- Since 2009, more than 21,000 street cats have been sterilized in Albuquerque.
- Because of changes in the community cat program, the number of cats killed has dropped by 93%.



After

- The TNR program was the overwhelming reason for the statistical improvement and led to a huge reduction in the intake and killing of cats.
- Since February 2012, Albuquerque has not euthanized a cat labeled feral and has a better handle on population control.



After

Abrico, 4 years old at the time, was the last cat euthanized for being labeled feral. After further research, there was speculation that this cat may not have been feral after all. Abrico was surrendered by her owner in February 2012 because the owner was moving.



After

- With TNR, you want fewer cats, so most of the public's concern was an illusion.
- You're reducing the population, suffering and nuisance behaviors.
- People forget that you're not adding cats; you're returning cats who were already there.



Working with ACOs

How do you get animal control officers on board?





Working with ACOs

- In Albuquerque, TNR improved ACO response times to calls for service. Since the policy was changed, ACOs do not respond to requests to pick up cats to be killed.
- Feeders are now speaking to ACOs without concern that the cats might be killed or the feeders could be cited.



Working with ACOs

GETTING ACOS ON BOARD

1. Leadership has to be on board (turnover).
Leadership has to win them over or make them do it.
2. At some point, the policy is not optional.
3. It's not being nice: It's still about population control.



Working with ACOs

- TNR will free up their time for other things.
- It will improve the field response time to calls for service.
- The ACO division can focus on becoming professional investigators and get away from the dog catcher or exterminator image.



Working with ACOs

- There was some friction from the community as the policy was changed.
- Public concerns were:
 - Damage to property
 - A danger to wildlife
 - Concern about spread of rabies and other zoonotic diseases
 - Concern that it was inhumane to release them



Additional Resources

Action Kit: Advocating for TNR in Your Community

bestfriends.org/resources/animal-advocacy

- PowerPoint template for advocates
- Frequently asked questions and the answers about TNR

