Community Cats
MACC Advisory Board July 2013

What is a community cat?

- Outdoor / Free roaming
- Un-owned or semi-owned
- Tame, Feral or anything

in between

They are all treated the same at Pet Community Center. Why?

- When cats breed, they don't care who is a pet, who is semi owned, semi feral, tame, stray – they just reproduce!

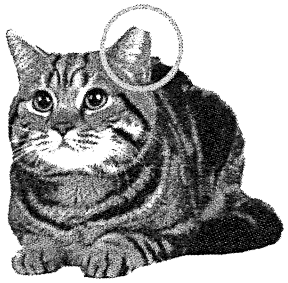
How many community cats are in Nashville?

40,000 – 50,000 – roughly half are owned or semi-owned pets and the rest are feral

- 85%+ of all pet cats are fixed. Pet owners got the message!
- 90% of community cats are not fixed. Now we must communicate that this is a community wide issue that everyone is responsible for. We can't fix 50,000 cats alone, we need the community's help.
- 82% of all kittens born originate with a community cat
- This population is the MOST critical in the task to end over population.

What is Trap-Neuter-Return? (TNR)

- Cats are humanely trapped and taken to a veterinary clinic where they are spayed/neutered, vaccinated for rabies (and sometimes FVRCP) and receive a left ear tip.
- Cats are returned to their original environment



WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENCES?

SHELTER NEUTER

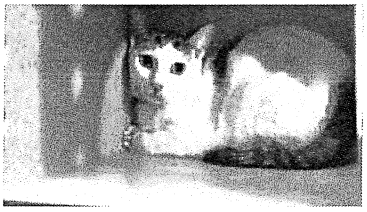
- Focused more on what happens to cats in the shelter rather than in the community.
- Identify hot spots and red flags in the community
- Reduce euthanasia.
- Cats qualify by being "unsocialized" and in good body condition
- Kittens must be 4 months old

RETURN

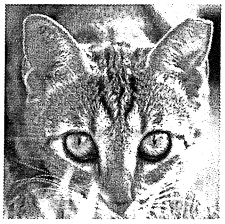
- feeder reaches out and seeks help
- The word RETURN is critical. It's not release.
- Is also the follow up tool to SNR - focus on cats in the community.
- Reduce over population and intake.

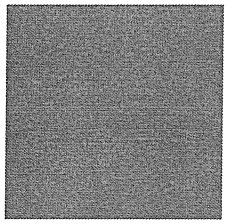
Let's talk money

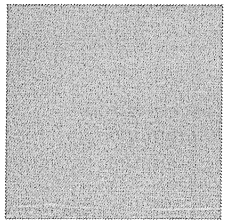
- Besides being the humane response and the most effective response, it is the most economical response
- Nashville
  - Average cost to admit, house, feed, clean, euthanize, dispose in Nashville in 2012 = $192
  - Cost to TNR a cat at Fix For Life $35
  - Chattanooga
    - Average cost per cat = $170
    - Cost to SNR = $70
  - San Jose
    - Average cost per cat = $233
    - Cost to SNR = $60



Current Approach







2012
4,400 cats came in
88% were euthanized

Est. 2,000 were feral
=4% of the outdoor cat pop.

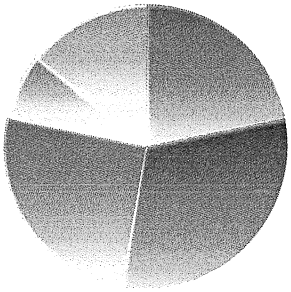
Why is the cat euthanasia rate so high?

TAME CATS

Most people do not get a cat from a shelter

When cats are lost, people don't react the way they would if their dog got lost. Reclaim rates are very low nationally.

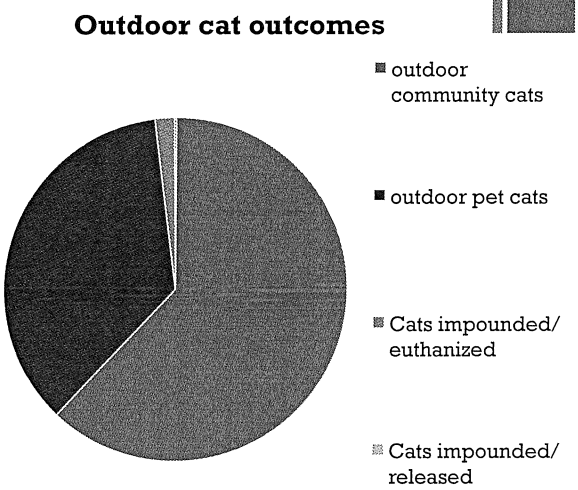
How people get pet cats



Why is the cat euthanasia rate so high?

FERAL AND SEMI-FERAL CATS

- Not adoptable as pets
- Not enough barn homes to re-home them all.



Why is the cat euthanasia rate so high?

There is no conceivable mathematical or biological model in which removing 4% (or even 6% or 10%) of a population will mitigate or control the population. So whether we leave them outside, or take them into the shelter; it won't reduce any of the risks, concerns or issues associated with outdoor cats.

Concern #1
Wildlife Predation

- Undisputed
- Wildlife lovers and cat lovers want the same result!
- But what is the most effective, economical and humane way to get there?

Options for mitigating the population

- Trap and Remove (euthanize)
  - Too costly (Marion Island)
  - No place for the cats to go; re-homing unrealistic
  - Public would not tolerate extermination of 50K cat
- Do nothing
  - Ha, ha.
- Feeding ban
  - Impossible to enforce
  - Bad public policy to criminalize kindness
- Trap-Neuter-Return
  - 75% of population in an area must be sterilized to stabilize and reduce numbers
  - TNR is successful in other cities.

Concern #1
Wildlife Predation

- Undisputed – cats prey on wildlife
- Wildlife lovers and cat lovers want the same result!
- But what is the most effective, economical and humane way to get there?
- TNR is the most cost effective, humane and realistic strategy

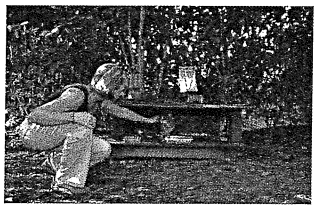
TRUE STORY! Downtown 2nd Ave. Nuisance or necessity?

- Removal service hired to remove all the cats ($89 per cat, $250 trap setting fee per 2-4 cats)
- Within a few months area overrun by rodents and snakes
- New cats began to fill the area (vacuum effect)
- Residents contacted us and we fixed all the cats.
- Residents feed and care for cats – and APPRECIATE them.

Concern #2
Welfare of the Cats

- There is no evidence that shows that cats will live a horrible life, will be abused or get hit by cars. Living outside is NOT a death sentence – after all we do have 50,000 cats in Nashville who are thriving
- TNR actually improves the life of the cat by allowing it to focus on self preservation and not reproduction. It also significantly reduces disease and nuisance behavior that could lead to undesirable human interaction.
- Myth that outdoor cats are diseased and unhealthy
  - TNR clinics surveyed – Out of 100,000 cats, less than 1% were euthanized for poor body condition.
  - A study indicated that average life span of a feral cat is 6 yrs (avg. pet cat life span is 7.1 years)

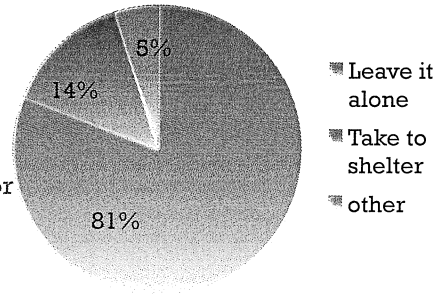
Concern #2
Welfare of the Cats



- Dr. Kate Hurley survey also showed that survival rate of managed colonies is 90% and survival rate of un-owned/ managed cats is 50%. MOST outdoor cats are managed by someone.
- San Jose, CA – Animal Control picks up dead animals. Since their program started they have picked up fewer than 3 dozen ear tipped cats that were hit by cars. Only 40 had to be euthanized at time of surgery (approx. 1,500 per year – since 2010)
- The concern is real – and shared by other cities. Fortunately none of the fears have materialized in other cities. No greater danger exists after TNR than before.

Concern #3
Resolving Citizen Complaints

- 8.8% of the cat population is being brought to the shelter. Hardly a huge number of cats. Most cats are not a nuisance.
- National survey: "What would you do about an un-owned cat on the street if you knew that taking it to the shelter would mean euthanasia?"
- Is it effective to base policy on the small group of people who are inconvenienced or annoyed?



Resolving Citizen Complaints

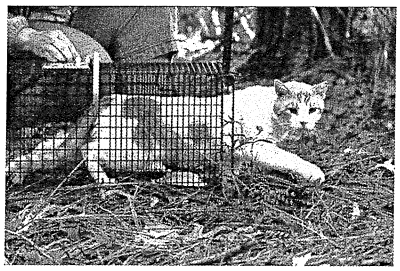
- Jacksonville – overall cat complaints did not rise, feral complaints went down
- Chattanooga – complaints down
- Can we find non-lethal ways to resolve complaints?
  - How can I help YOU solve this problem?
- Might they be even more effective in the long term?
- Webinar last Thursday: People are pretty pliable – fewer complaints than expected, they do as directed. We have the ability to redirect their efforts.

TRUE STORY! Chimneytop Apts. Antioch – Vacuum effect

- 2010 and 2011 hired removal service to take away 30+ cats; 1 or 2 times per year.
- The cats came back every year – removal was not cheap!
- They called us in 2012 and we fixed 30+ cats
- We followed up in 2013 and they reported 6 new cats. So we TNR'd them
- Adjacent community is refusing TNR and is removing them and enforcing a feeding ban, cats are migrating to Chimneytop.

Concern #4 Solving Overpopulation

- SNR reduces shelter euthanasia and identifies "hot spots" for targeted TNR
- TNR reduces over population and shelter intake
- Together they are proving to be powerful tools



Success Stories

- San Jose – SNR started 2010 - intake is down 25%, euth is down 65%, Euth due to URI (for all shelter cats) is down 90%, cats picked up dead down 17%
- Jacksonville – started 2007 – intake down 23%, euthanasia down 45%
- Gainesville – TNR started in 1994, SNR in 2008, intake is down 53%
- Chattanooga - live release in cats up from 41% in 2011 to 71% in 2013
- Tampa – started 2007, intake down 47%, euth down 54%
- Indianapolis - TNR from 2004 – 2007; intake down 37% and euth down 29%, they have since implemented SNR and are working on new stats.
- San Antonio –Started 2011 euth. down 59% (in the first year)
- Albuquerque – (fall 2012) intake of cats in the past 12 months was down 24% compared to the same period four years ago and the euthanasia rate for cats in the past 12 months was down 72% compared to the same period four years earlier.
- Salt Lake City – launched in 2008 – intake down 22% the first year, euth down 40%

Other cities conducting Shelter Neuter Return

- Charleston, SC
- DeKalb Co., GA
- Marion Co., FL
- Austin, TX

Now is a time for action
Best Friends Community Cat Program

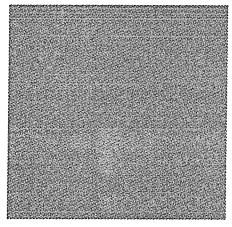
Albuquerque, San Antonio, Baltimore

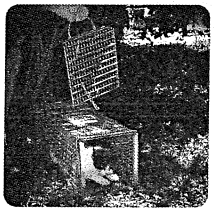
3 new cities being added in spring 2014
Nashville is on the radar screen
Must lay ground work now to qualify later this year

Albuquerque Goals – Year 1

25% reduction euthanasia
10% reduction intake
30% increase live release rate
3,500 surgeries per year

ACTUAL result first FIVE months:
68% reduction in euthanasia
17% reduction in intake
1,500 fewer animals euthanized than prior year time period
2,200 cats TNR'd, no feral cats were euthanized.





TRUE STORY! McAlpine St. East Nashville – good life

- Contacted by people on both ends of 2 mile long street
- We dug further and found 6-7 feeders
- TNR'd most of the cats in the area, except one guy who took a leave of absence and left his 4 female cats
- Now he's back, his cats had kittens (13 of them) and....he called us!
- The feeders stay in touch, let us know if there's a new cat, feed the cats, name them, let them sleep in their shed's, found homes for many of the kittens. (but they don't have to do that any more – so one lady became a foster for Nashville Cat Rescue!)

Karen Walsh, Exec. Director McKamey Animal Ctr - Chattanooga

This program has helped decrease our animal care days, reduce our URI, increase our time for animal enrichment, decrease our complaints from the community, increase our live release in cats from 41% in 2011 to 71% in 2013. This program has nothing to do with "abandoning cats" releasing sick cats or passing a problem back out into the community. It is a systematic method of dealing with population reduction through a positive rather than a negative method and it works. I have been in Animal Control through seeing organizations euthanize almost all cats, refuse to deal with cats at all and run a "no cats" shelter or be a shelter that is overcrowded with sick cats and I think this solution is the best I've seen yet!

I would recommend it for Nashville.

Please check out these resources

- Webinar from Dr. Kate Hurley of Koret Shelter Medicine Program: http://www.maddiesfund.org/Maddies_Institute/Webcasts/Making_the_Case_for_Community_Cats_Part_One.html
- Academic Research
  - handout

Questions?

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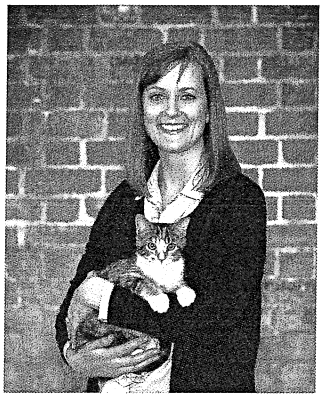

Academic/Scientific Research conducted on Feral Cats/TNR

Levy, Julie K., David W. Gale, and Leslie A. Gale. "Evaluation of the Effect of a Long-Term Trap-Neuter-Return and Adoption Program on a Free- Roaming Cat Population." *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association* 222, no. 1 (2003): 42-46.
This study tracks a TNR program on a Florida college campus over the course of 11 years to determine the characteristics of cats involved and to document the effectiveness of the program at controlling the population of cats on the campus. Kittens and tame cats were adopted out, and new cats were trapped and neutered. At the end of the study, the population had decreased by 66%, and over 80% of the cats had been residents for more than six years—a duration comparable to the mean lifespan of 7.1 years for pet cats.

Finkler, Hilit, Idit Gunther, and Joseph Terkel. "Behavioral differences between urban feeding groups of neutered and sexually intact free-roaming cats following a trap-neuter-return procedure." *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association* 238, no. 9 (2011):1141-1149.
Researchers compared data from four feral cat colonies: two that were cared for through Trap-Neuter-Return programs and two that were not and demonstrated that TNR reduces the behaviors associated with mating and can therefore address community concerns. They found that cats in the TNR colonies were less aggressive on the whole and that the neutered males were rarely aggressive towards each other at all, resulting in less yowling, fighting, and potential for injury than males in the intact colonies.

Scott, Karen C., Julie K. Levy, and Shawn P. Gorman. "Body Condition of Feral Cats and the Effect of Neutering." *Journal of Applied Animal Welfare Science* 5, no. 3 (2002): 203-213.
This study examines the effects of neutering on feral cat health by measuring the body condition of feral cats upon trapping, then measuring it again for 14 cats who were trapped again one year later. The cats who were trapped initially were lean but not emaciated, and the cats trapped one year after neutering showed significant increases in weight and improvements in body condition. In addition, caregivers reported that the cats had a decreased tendency to roam after being neutered.

Natoli, Eugenia, et. al. "Management of Feral Domestic Cats in the Urban Environment of Rome (Italy)." *Preventative Veterinary Medicine* 77 (2006): 180-185.
This study documents the cat population over 10 years in a well-established Trap-Neuter-Return program in Rome, Italy, and determines that a long-term TNR program significantly reduces feral cat colony size. Colony size consistently decreased over the time period, ranging from a 16% decline in colonies neutered three years into the program to a 32% decrease in colonies neutered six years into the program. Also, as the program became more visible, the number of registered feral cat colonies increased from 76 to 965. The authors caution that community

education is crucial to preventing intact pet cats from joining the stray and feral cat population.

Hughes, Kathy L. and Margaret R. Slater. "Implementation of a Feral Cat Management Program on a University Campus." ***Journal of Applied Animal Welfare Science*** **5, no. 1 (2002): 15-28.**

Hughes and Slater document the success of a new Trap, Test, Vaccinate, Alter (spay or neuter), Return, and Monitor (TTVARM, a.k.a. TNR) program on the campus of Texas A&M University, looking at the changes between the implementation year and the year that followed. In the first year, 123 cats were trapped, compared to 35 in the second. Over the course of the program, 32 cats and kittens were adopted. In the second year, only three kittens were found, and the researchers assume that these were lost or abandoned, as no litters or nursing mothers were seen in that year. The program illustrated how a well-managed TNR program can stabilize a population of cats.