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PETS - San Francisco helping feral cats beyond its borders thanks to embracing shelter neuter return program

By Hanna Booth

My recent Alley Cat Ally blog (<http://www.insidetoronto.com/blogs/post/4041493-the-alley-cat-ally-talking-about-the-new-way-of-helping-cats-shelter-neuter-return/>) highlighted the lifesaving new approach to managing feral or stray community cats.

These shelter neuter return programs sterilize and vaccinate outdoor cats rather than intaking them into the shelter where euthanasia is a likely outcome.

In this column I'd planned to discuss the implementation of such programs.

But before I go on, I thought I should clarify how this shelter neuter return (SNR) is different from my typical banter on trap neuter return (TNR).

TNR usually focuses on colonies of feral cats in a particular area, whereas SNR targets free-roaming cats throughout the community and outdoor strays that are being brought into shelters.

A number of cities have successfully incorporated shelter neuter return programs into their animal sheltering policies and are now appreciating the results of drastically reduced euthanasia rates. San Francisco is one of these cities.

The San Francisco SPCA runs a program that targets all free-roaming cats in the city to participate in its SNR program. What makes this program so amazing is the outreach to local residents, which has received almost exclusively full support by the community.

Overwhelmingly, San Francisco residents have decided that they would rather have stray/ feral cats remain in their environment versus being brought into a shelter for euthanasia.



After being hit by a car, Love You, named by Alley Cat Ally blogger's son, is ready for adoption. Email jbooth@toronto.ca

Furthermore, San Francisco residents have become engaged in the program and have started to bring stray cats in for sterilization.

One of the key components to making this program such a success was the widespread public awareness and social media campaigns. All over town, the transit buses and subways displayed the “Do You See Cats” campaign material, which directed residents to contact a central number to coordinate bringing that cat in for sterilization.

Videos and tweets in social media, as well as door-to-door direct mailings about how to help free-roaming cats in your neighborhood, have expanded the community outreach and support for the program.

Check out this Portlandia spoof about feral cats to see what I’m talking about - <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sFI0vOJGKw8#t=130> ([ttp://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sFI0vOJGKw8#t=130](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sFI0vOJGKw8#t=130))

As I’m reaching my word max for this column, I’ll end by letting you know that San Francisco is now one of the first cities in history that is transporting cats into the city for adoption. This is unheard of in shelter medicine as everywhere else in the world we are euthanizing staggering numbers of cats because of overpopulation. So it really can work – with the proper education and resources – communities will support these programs.

Website of the month

This month’s edition of the Animal Sheltering Magazine featured an articulate and informative article (http://www.animalsheltering.org/resources/magazine/sep_oct_2013/change-for-community-cats.html) on this subject of shelter neuter return for community cats. The article was written by the renowned shelter veterinarian Kate Hurley. It is a great read and comes highly recommended.

Hurley started her career as an animal control field officer before going back to school to become a veterinarian so she could find way to keep shelter cats healthier. She is one of the most inspiring individuals I heard speak and she has been instrumental in improving shelter standards across North America.

Cat of the month

Love You, named by my three-year-old son, is a young svelte brown tabby. He’s about two years old and is neutered, vaccinated and in good health. He was found on the side of the road after being hit by a car and was taken to an emergency clinic. Luckily he walked away with no injuries and was transferred over to Toronto Animal Services.

When he first came into the shelter he was terrified and acted feral. But over time, he learned to trust and won my heart over. I fostered him for a few weeks and he was a wonderful (and very clean) cat. Although he seems to have grown up on the streets without a lot of human contact, he has quickly become fond of people and is very affectionate with people he trusts. He is currently up for adoption at the South Animal Services Shelter. If you may be interested in adopting or fostering Love You, email jbooth@toronto.ca

Love You tested positive for feline immunodeficiency virus (FIV). For details on FIV, visit <http://www.veterinarypartner.com/Content.plx?A=1313> (<http://www.veterinarypartner.com/Content.plx?A=1313>)

Hanna Booth is a shelter veterinarian with a special interest in targeted spay/neuter programs to combat pet overpopulation. Booth and her husband spent a year spaying street animals in Central America; worked as a veterinarian at the Toronto Humane Society; now works for Toronto Animal Services; is a leading member of the Toronto Feral Cat TNR Coalition; and also runs a volunteer program www.torontostreetcats.com. She lives in Roncesvalles with her husband, son, three former street cats and a revolving door of foster cats and kittens.