

Orange County Animal Services Free Roaming Cat Task Force Recommendations

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Table of Contents:

1. Summary
2. Goals
3. Benefits
4. Strategies and Initiatives
5. Resources
6. Program Evaluation
7. Appendices

1. Summary

In 2010, OCAS developed and implemented its Strategic Plan to Manage Pet Overpopulation (appendix A). By incorporating plans for low cost and targeted spay/neuter surgeries and developing relationships with placement partners, this plan has been very successful in both decreasing the overall number of pets that enter the sheltering system and increasing the number of live releases from the shelter. (XXXX)

As a county and community of people that care deeply about their pets, we feel can do much better. The free roaming cat population in our county is still very large and constitutes a large portion of the pets we shelter. In 2013, 1400 cats entered the shelter. Only 4% or 56 of those cats were returned from the shelter to their original owner. Overall, 35% were euthanized and 65% were either placed into adoption organizations or new homes. Over 20% of the dog population sheltered was reclaimed by their owners. It is suggested that 3 times the number of cats sheltered exist and free roaming in a community (JAVMA cite) and that each un-spayed female can produce 2.5 litters each year each consisting on average of 6 kittens (JAVMA cite). XXXX

We don't know the exact reason for the discrepancy in cat and dog reclamation, but we do know that the cat's ability to survive outside a home for extended periods is good so they are not as likely to enter a shelter quickly after wandering away from a property or caretaker. *Think of it this way, if you drive by a dog without a person on a public street you try to capture it or call animal control/first responders for help in making it safe and getting it back to his owner. If a cat is running across a public street, we all just try not to hit it with our car but rarely is there an effort to collect the cat and find out if it has a family.*

These independent cats or free roaming cats are cats that are loosely associated with one or more families, caretakers, or a community or have no association with anyone.

Testimony from several members of the veterinary community cited that many families have one or more inside cats that they claim as their pet but also sometimes feed and provide less substantial shelter for one or more outside cats that they do not claim as their pets. (Appendix meeting notes from partners meeting)

THIS PROBLEM impacts each and every person in our county. There are too many cats and many of the cats that are lucky enough to have owners aren't being cared for in a way that protects our community health, our wildlife and the cats themselves. Shelter statistics can't even begin to identify how many cats are out there and cats don't understand boundaries between communities and counties. We would never tolerate dogs roaming the streets yet we turn our head to cats and shrug them off as okay outside. And although cats may be able to survive on the streets, the survival isn't always good survival. Cats currently stay in the shelter system two times longer than dogs adding to the cost of sheltering. Cats are less likely to be returned to their original owner adding to the cost of sheltering. Cats are 4 times more likely to be exposed to rabies (in 2013 there were 20 cats and 5 dogs in North Carolina that tested positive for rabies- this does not represent the number of cats that died from rabies virus that were not tested). Cats are currently a large burden on the resources that we have and they don't have to be.

The independence of the free roaming cat and it's loose association with a caretaker or family make it a more complex issue requiring a multimodal approach if we are to decrease the overall number of cats. We will focus on public education, community partners, targeted spay/neuter programs and identification as the main targets in our plan.

The free roaming cat task force (FRCTF) was established in December 2013 and has held 13 public meetings with special focus on partners in the community, cat caregivers, wildlife experts and concerns, and general public comments. We've learned about community programs in Asheville, Charleston, Gainesville, Spartanburg, Wake County and Miami that align with Orange County demographics and general community concerns. Although each of these communities took a different approach to controlling their cat population, they all had common themes that we wish to incorporate into our plan- education of the community, community participation, and partnerships with community groups to allow more cats to be spayed/neutered, vaccinated and identified. Each of these communities was incredibly proud of their accomplishments and their ability to work together and help end unnecessary euthanasia (appendix meeting notes).

From these meetings, we feel we have been able to identify ways to reduce cat euthanasia today and tomorrow even further by reducing the intake of cats into the shelter system. With decreased numbers of cats in a community, the overall health and welfare of the cat improves as does the public health of the citizens in the community. In addition, the overall cost for sheltering cats and cat nuisance calls decreases dramatically leading to less tax dollars spent on sheltering.

2. Goals

Our goal is simple, reduce cat euthanasia now and in the future by decreasing the number of free roaming cats in Orange County and the number of cats entering the shelter system.

3. Benefits

The benefits of decreasing the number of free roaming cats are far reaching and will have many positive influences on our community on all socioeconomic levels.

- The overall cost of sheltering and animal control nuisance calls will be reduced thereby decreasing tax dollars spent.
- There will be less predation on wildlife species as the population of outside cats decreases.
- The overall health and welfare of the free roaming cat improve as they are more adequately vaccinated, identified and not producing multiple litters. Fewer cats equals fewer internal and external parasites and less disease associated with the stress of living outside.
- Our public health will improve as fewer cats means less spread of zoonotic disease (Rabies, fecal intestinal parasites and protozoal parasites).

4. Strategies and Initiatives

The number and span of free roaming cats makes this a problem that's bigger than Animal Services can handle by itself. There are several organizations and initiatives already in operation in Orange County that can be expanded on and utilized to help meet our goals.

- Public Outreach/Community Education

Our public education and outreach is targeted towards educating our community about opportunities for low cost or no cost spay/neuter programs, the benefits of keeping cats indoors, the importance of vaccinations and care of cats and identification.

Already in our community we have several groups working towards these goals. Enhancing and encouraging their work, will allow greater overall success.

- Kids for Kindness is a non-profit that started in Hillsborough and teaches 4th graders the importance of spaying and neutering pets and the reality of sheltered pets.
- Independent Animal Rescue is a non-profit that has a huge positive influence on the free roaming cat population providing underprivileged citizens with low or no cost surgery opportunities and fostering feral kittens to make them adoptable and less likely to stay outside.
- Veterinarians are already seeing cat patients every day and will be enlisted to help spread the word about the benefits of keeping cats inside, identification

of pets and the overwhelming benefit of spay/neuter and environment enrichment.

- Our animal services staff are already posting flyers and door hangers in areas where free roaming cats are centered for low cost spay neuter programs.
- Our shelter staff can include information in the adoption information that goes home with each adopted pet that targets the benefits of keeping cats indoors, demonstrates how to enrich their inside environment, and the benefits of identification of pets adopted.

In addition we will encourage other community participation by:

- Setting up a volunteer core for public participation, i.e. a grassroots outreach to reach community members about spay/neuter possibilities, identification, and public health issues.
- OCAS will set up programs to train caregivers in safety, trapping and handling of cats, the importance of spay/neuter of colonies and building caretaker trust in Animal Services as part of the team building process.

Triangle wide we would like to join with other Animal Service agencies in an advertising campaign (billboards, social media, door to door community saturation) to encourage spay/neuter, vaccinations and identification of cats as well as educating people about how to enrich the environment inside their homes to be more satisfying to the cat.

- Targeted Spay Neuter

As long as cats are outside and reproductively active, there will continue to be a surplus of cats. There are several programs already in place that we can build on to spread the word and make low cost and no cost spay neuter opportunities available.

- Animal Kind has been operation in Orange County since (insert date) and has provided DHHS qualified clients with over 400 spay neuter surgeries each year at the lost cost of \$20 or free.
- Independent Animal Rescue works with apartment communities and neighborhoods to identify problem cat areas and offers targeted spay neuter and the *foster for feral* program to allow kittens that may have stayed on the street to have the opportunity to be tamed and adopted.
- We will address how to keep up with the identity, reproductive capability, and vaccination status of cats within the colony of feral free roamers.
- The SNAP mobile spay neuter clinic is already in operation. We can direct more citizens to that opportunity and also present underprivileged citizens with Litter Patrol and other vouchers for subsidized spay/neuter opportunities.

- TNR (trap neuter return) will be utilized in established feral colonies to decrease the number of kittens produced and increase the overall health of the colony. Colonies will be identified with a caretaker and identified as individuals so vaccine, reproductive capacity and health of each individual can be maintained. OCAS will try to subsidize the cost of spay/neuter, vaccines, identification and registration.

- Timeline for success

		TIMETABLE	
		Initiative	Outcome
Year 1		Education when adopting from OCAS	Indoor cat promotion
		Education via Veterinary Community	Indoor cat promotion
		Continued coordination with Kids4Kindness regarding schools	Indoor cat promotion, spay/neuter education
		Public Affairs Campaign	
Year 2		Partnership formations	what are the mutual or common ground needs?
		Program evaluation framework created	baseline database, shared guidelines for tracking and evaluation
		Expand \$20 Fix to Cat Caretakers	increase number spay/neuters
Year 3		Fosters for Feral Kittens	reduce free roamers
		Evaluation of Program	compare year 1 to year 2
		Identify areas for Pilot Program	
Year 4		Pilot Program	increase number spay/neuter

	Pilot Program Evaluation	
	Evaluation of Program	compare years 1-2-3
Year 5	Partner Referrals	increase number spay/neuters
	Cat regulations	neede changes identified
	Evaluate Sustainability	

With enhanced education and targeted spay/neuter programs in place, there can be an end to cat overpopulation.

5. Resources

As stated previously, free roaming cats are an overwhelming issue in this community with an estimated 4,500 cats currently in population. Animal Services will not be able to handle this issue alone, we must ask our community for help and educate the community that it's time for social change. We will need to work with and support community partners to get these programs up and running. Groups that are already here and working are Animal Kind, Independent Animal Rescue, Kids for Kindness, SNAP, veterinarians, Coalition to Unchain Dogs and others. We can't overlook or underestimate the importance and work that these groups are performing.

6. Program Evaluation

As we progress into our plan to decrease the number of free roaming cats we want to start looking at measures to evaluate program success.

- We will look at the number of litters of kittens presented to the shelter each year.
- We will look at the number of cats entering the shelter returned to their original owners for a measure of success.
- We will look at the length of stay or total sheltered days.
- We will look at euthanasia numbers.
- We will consult with community partners annually to gather community statistics and offer means of support to their programs.
- We will encourage our community partners to contribute the number of cats they've worked with.
- We will be vigilant in identifying other partners that can help us succeed and incorporate their help when possible.

7. Appendix

- A. Meeting notes by date
- B. Strategic Plan
- C. cat stats
- D. JAVMA articles on feral cat stats
- E. Pilot Program ideas
 - could be Trap Neuter Return to an existing maintained feral colony
 - could be Trap Neuter Return to the area where the cat was found
 - could be as much subsidized spay/neuter as possible to targeted areas