

FRC task Force
Meeting March 5, 2014
Notes prepared by Suzanne Roy

Members in attendance: Dewana Anderson (chair), Aviva Scully, Judy Miller, Suzanne Roy, Warren Porter.

Staff in attendance: Bob Marotto, Animal Services Director; Josh Fisher, Veterinary Health Care Manager; Sarah Fallin, Program Coordinator

Public In Attendance: Approximately 40 members of the public were present, including representatives of Independent Animal Rescue, AnimalKind, SNAP, Kids4Kindness, The Cat Hospital of Durham, Chapel Hill Mobile Veterinary Services, and the NC Wildlife Commission.

I. Introduction –

The Task Force chair, DeWana Anderson, DVM reviewed the Task Force Charge and introduced the members of the committee and OCAS staff present.

Bob Moratto reviewed the cat statistics from our shelter over recent years, drawing attention to the rise of cats and kittens during the summer months. He brought up that our community expects animals to be treated well and we are lucky to have resources not available to other counties to house more cats for longer periods but all that is a cost to taxpayers.

He emphasized the importance pre-adoption spay neuter has made in the overall dog and cat population in Orange, but that we still had a way to go with cat numbers. He also noted that the partnership that Orange has made with Animal Kind and the influx of funds from NC Spay/Neuter Reimbursement Program have been a tremendous help so far.

Bob also noted that the return rate for dogs to their owners in Orange is 25%, but cats are returned to their owners only 3% of the time. He made note that our 3% return is higher than the national average.

He emphasized that without strong community partners and without a community wide plan, we will not be able to achieve our goals.

The floor was then turned over to the public that were participating or interested in participating as partners.

A question was posed to the veterinary community present as to how many feral cats versus free roaming or owned do they see in their practices.

Dr Bartfield of SNAP stated that they do not see as many feral cats as they would like to see for spay/neuter. They do offer special feral rates and will schedule special community or colony days if a group thinks they can round up enough cats to fill a day schedule and have a heated or cooled area to recover the pets.

Dr. Szymkowski of The Cat Hospital of Durham stated that they have a few clients that regularly trap feral cats (including IAR) during the spring and summer.

Dr. Driehuys of Chapel Hill Mobile Veterinary Housecalls stated that most houses in Chapel Hill or Orange County have extra cats outside. People don't always consider or provide the same care for the outside cat as the cats they have inside their homes.

The same question was posed to the rescue community.

Mary Dow of Independent Animal Rescue said that they spay/neuter around 1,200 cats total a year, but they operate in Durham, Orange and Wake Counties. In Orange County last year they spayed/neutered around 200 cats last year.

IAR stated that their adoption programs have changed. Instead of taking cats and kittens from shelters and placing them into foster homes, they take a lot of feral kittens and tame them and then place them.

It was discussed that several of the low cost spay/neuter options are no longer available. Pop Van closed, Operation Catnip moved and downsized. The shelter veterinarian cannot perform surgery on owned pets in the shelter surgery facility.

The discussion turned to whether or not feral cats were owned animals. It was stated that one that feeds or offers care to a pet for 3 days is a keeper of the pet and so a grey area. Also discussed was whether TNR (trap neuter release) was legal in Orange County. Scott Anderson of NC Wildlife Commission brought up that it is illegal to release animals into the wild. Also discussed were licensing issues and potential for zoonotic disease transmission specifically Rabies.

It was agreed that some framework in place that outlines permissible collection and treatment of cats would be ideal. Nuisance issues are commonplace when someone has a high number of cats and the start to roam on neighboring properties.

The question was posed to Bob Moratto, how do you deal with educating a community about free roaming cat care?

He stated that currently cats here in Orange are treated like dogs in third world countries. We allow cats to roam, to reproduce, to have no boundaries, and we would never consider leaving a dog in that type of predicament.

One route of introducing cat care education could be through college fraternity and sororities.

The Catalyst Council has been created to change our value system for cats nationwide.

HSUS is working to change how cats are presented in entertainment.

Correlation between cat abandonment and university schedules?

Representatives from Kids for Kindness said they take the "Pets for Life" model into 4th grade classrooms in our county. This is a model where kids pick the pets from actual photographs of pets from our shelter and put 3% into return to owner, 60% into placement partner groups for adoption and 35% into a basket marked for euthanasia in an effort to make children think about the pets as more than disposable.

An item for education should be the cat reproduction cycle and how easy it is for them to reproduce several times a year, having several kittens per litter as young as 4.5 months with no regard to relationship (brother/sister/father/mother).

An educational venue that was discussed was Art with attention drawn to Landfill Dogs a book and photography of Shannon Johnstone.

A question was posed to the rescue groups as to what did they see as difficulties in trying to spay/neuter cats.

Mary Dow of IAR said that they were trying to get the word out that TNR works. IAR is also trying to bring education about low cost surgery options to local veterinarians.

IAR has small core of volunteers that go out and help people round up neighborhood cats. But IAR is now trying to teach people to help themselves. They will provide vouchers for surgery and advice about how to capture a free roaming cat.

Both SNAP and IAR say that they have waiting lists, but are willing to take on more cats if needed.

Spay NC Helpline is set up online and via telephone to point people to low cost surgery in their area.

Josh Fisher, OCAS Veterinary Health Care Manager, is doing outreach to veterinary clinics about resources – low income services.

Bob Marotto made the statement that veterinarians need to be aware of resources available for lower income families. Perhaps there should be a campaign through

the NCVMA.

IAR said that they partner already with 7 local veterinarians that are willing to perform low cost surgery on 1-2 low cost or no cost cats a week.

Animal Kind also provides vouchers for DHHS clients for low cost surgery.

It was agreed that all public should be directed to shelter for pet adoption as they are already sterilized, vaccinated, can have a low cost microchip implanted.

It was stated that the general public may perceive things differently than advocates do. More so now than at the old OCAS there should be a positive experience when entering the shelter. What else can be done to make the image more positive?

All agreed that the partnerships should help to change the public image.

Kids for Kindness said they include positive images of the shelter system in their 4th grade visits although they represent the sad side of the shelter also.

Both Bob and Scott agreed that a shift in perspective to keep cats inside was in order.

Scott Anderson stated that the NC Wildlife Commission does not have a position on cat control. He said that the WC looks at populations instead of individuals and there is no known number of birds killed by cats in NC each year. They look more at the toll of how human direct mortality-collisions with buildings and cars, cat issues, etc... They are very interested in preserving native species.

Any cat control plan will not work unless you have public involvement. Bringing people with diverse interests in to form partnerships to deal with the issue is important. Discussions with wildlife interests in our community.

Sarah Reichert stated that reducing the number of free roaming cats across the board will lessen impacts on wildlife species.

We should be able to find a common goal – reducing the cat population improves cat welfare and alleviates impacts on wildlife.

IAR only adopts out cats to people who will keep them inside.

It was thought that if the cat community could come up with a model like Amanda Arrington HSUS Coalition to Unchain Dogs we could gain support in the community from unthought of sources. The Coalition went to realty companies, neighborhood associations, etc. and said, how likely are you to sell that house with the 90 pound dog chained to the tree in the front yard? Help us get the pet neutered and his yard fenced and we all win

We hope to find a parallel with the work they've done and then a solution to the problem.

Meeting was adjourned at 8:45pm.