

Tag! You're Home!

Reunification of Pet Cats with their Owners Using a Community Engagement Approach

10th National G2Z Summit & Workshops | Equity in Access | 16 - 18 September 2025



1

Introductions



Aimee Dalrymple
Shelter Veterinary Care
Consulting LLC



Nina Stively
Director, Loudoun County
Animal Services



Rachael Kreisler
Associate Professor,
Midwestern University

10th National G2Z Summit & Workshops | Equity in Access | 16 - 18 September 2025



2

What sparked our research

10th National G2Z Summit & Workshops | Equity in Access | 16 - 18 September 2025



3

Loudoun County Animal Services



- Municipal open-admission animal shelter
- Located in Loudoun County, Virginia, United States
- Annual intake of 2,300 animals (46% cats)
- Animal shelter and humane law enforcement
- Mandated stray hold period of 5 days
- 28% RTO rate for adult cats at the shelter

10th National G2Z Summit & Workshops | Equity in Access | 16 - 18 September 2025



4

Where did plan come from?

- RTO rates already high
- Community trust in shelter and new location inadvertently encouraged people to bring in found cats
- Finders felt unsupported when advised to leave cats in place
- Public shelters in Virginia may not “R,” only “T” and “N”

10th National G2Z Summit & Workshops | Equity in Access | 16 - 18 September 2025



5

Return to Owner (RTO) for Pet Cats

- RTO is a key function for municipal animal shelters in the United States but rates are low
- 66-75% of lost cats are found in their own neighborhoods
- Between 0.3 - 1 mi (0.5-1.6km) from home

10th National G2Z Summit & Workshops | Equity in Access | 16 - 18 September 2025



6

What we did

10th National G2Z Summit & Workshops | Equity in Access | 16 - 18 September 2025



7

Change Management

- Tag You're Home was part of a bigger public messaging initiative on free-roaming cats
- Flowcharts for public guidance at every shelter and dispatch phone
- Staff training ongoing
- Tag You're Home not publicly advertised, but offered as last resort.

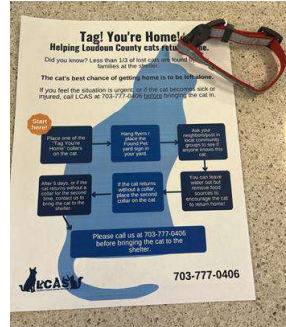
10th National G2Z Summit & Workshops | Equity in Access | 16 - 18 September 2025



8

Tag! You're Home! Program Details

- Engaged finders of un-microchipped healthy socialized adult cats
- Visibly pregnant, sick/injured cats and kittens < 5 months not candidates
- Given education about cat lifestyles
- Provided with 2 collars, flyers, +/- yard sign



10th National G2Z Summit & Workshops | Equity in Access | 16 - 18 September 2025



9

Tag! You're Home! Program Costs

- Collars ~\$15 per cat
- Posters and yard signs \$3 to \$30 per cat



10th National G2Z Summit & Workshops | Equity in Access | 16 - 18 September 2025



10

Tag! You're Home! Program Details

- Owner may text/call
- Offered free spay/neuter surgery, rabies vaccination, and microchip
- Finder may return in 5 days for intake
- Questions?
Nina Stively
Director of Animal Services
nina.stively@loudoun.gov



10th National G2Z Summit & Workshops | Equity in Access | 16 - 18 September 2025



11

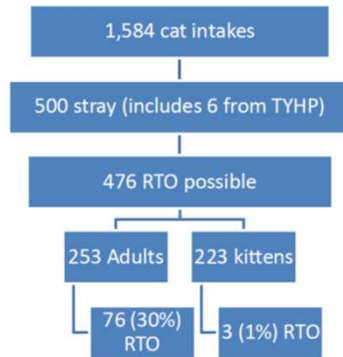
What we discovered

10th National G2Z Summit & Workshops | Equity in Access | 16 - 18 September 2025



12

Traditional RTO July 2022 to December 2023



10th National G2Z Summit & Workshops | Equity in Access | 16 - 18 September 2025



13

Traditional RTO

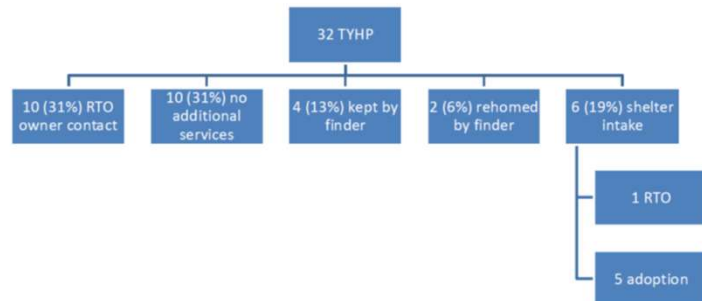
- RTO rate 17% overall
- 30% adult RTO
- Most common outcome subtypes for cats RTOed through the shelter:
 - Owner called or visited (21%)
 - Microchip (48%)

10th National G2Z Summit & Workshops | Equity in Access | 16 - 18 September 2025



14

Tag! You're Home! RTO



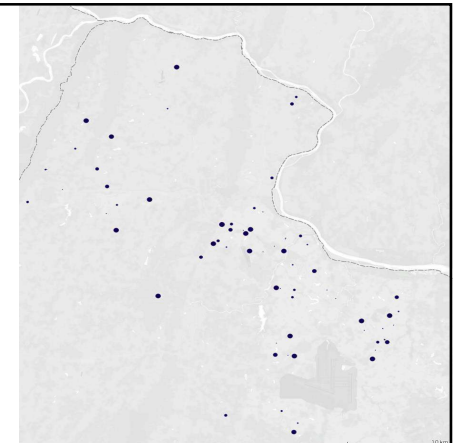
10th National G2Z Summit & Workshops | Equity in Access | 16 - 18 September 2025



15

Distance between found and home address

- Median 0.27 km (IQR 0.07-2.5)



10th National G2Z Summit & Workshops | Equity in Access | 16 - 18 September 2025



16

Owner's Response

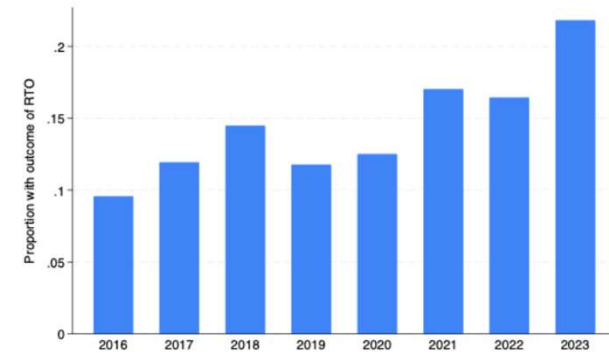
- All texted instead of called
- Most did not consider their cat lost
- 9/10 cats already sterilized

10th National G2Z Summit & Workshops | Equity in Access | 16 - 18 September 2025



17

Proportion of stray intakes with an outcome of return to owner (RTO)



10th National G2Z Summit & Workshops | Equity in Access | 16 - 18 September 2025



18

Key Takeaways

10th National G2Z Summit & Workshops | Equity in Access | 16 - 18 September 2025



19

Conclusion

- REUNITES CATS WITH THEIR OWNERS
Over 30% had a confirmed RTO outcome through the TYHP
- HELPS CATS WITHOUT MICROCHIPS
While this was very similar to the 28% adult RTO rate reported for traditional RTO, the TYHP provided a valuable tool to RTO cats without microchips
- REDUCES SHELTER INTAKE
Over 80% of cats enrolled in the TYHP did not require intake to the shelter, reducing shelter intake of adult stray cats by 9%

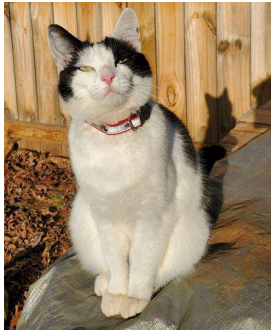


10th National G2Z Summit & Workshops | Equity in Access | 16 - 18 September 2025



20

Conclusion



- KEEPS CATS WHERE THEY ARE LIKELY TO BE FOUND
Cats RTOed via traditional methods were found a median of 0.27 km from their home
- PREVENTS CAT-NAPPING
Most cats RTOed via TYHP were not considered lost by their owners
- DOES NOT "CANNIBALIZE" TRADITIONAL RTO
The number of cats RTOed via traditional methods did not decrease during the study period

Full Article

<https://jsmcah.org/index.php/jasv/article/view/113>

