

Transforming Cat Management Through Community Desexing

Early Results from Salisbury



Cat Adoption Foundation (CAF), in partnership with the City of Salisbury and Adelaide Northern Veterinary Group (ANVG), are delivering a targeted desexing program to stabilise and reduce the cat population, with the long-term effect of increasing ownership rates and reducing cat-related nuisance complaints. Since its launch in late November 2024, 186 cats have been desexed across 13 sites identified by the Salisbury Council (as of 17 April 2025).

Of the 186 cats that have entered the program, one-third have been rehomed through CAF, one third have been desexed, registered and rehomed with local residents, and the remaining third are from sites that are still in progress under the pilot.

The initial phase of the project concentrates on coordinating desexing, vaccination, and microchipping services provided by ANVG. Next, CAF handles the rehoming where suitable, and finally, cats are registered with either their adopters or local residents. It is anticipated that a significant proportion of that final group will transition to ownership through microchip registration.

Another reason why registration may follow veterinary work is that, at some sites, establishing contact with residents can be challenging and trust takes time to build. As a result, registration is often addressed later in the project. Trust is essential for gaining access and accurate information about the cats—such as which ones are suitable for immediate rehoming and which would benefit from staying with the resident for further socialisation before rehoming.

Salisbury Council has identified sites for the project where traditional cat management approaches have not always been effective in managing complaints and resident compliance. The largest site involved over 50 cats and has been a long-standing problem area. To date, 45 cats have been desexed. Of these, 17 have been rehomed or are in the process of being rehomed by CAF, and 13 have been adopted by local residents. Of the 15 cats remaining, 5 have been earmarked for rehoming as the end of kitten season allows for increased care and adoption capacity for adults. The plan is to register the remaining cats to local residents.

Cat Outcomes – Largest Site

Outcomes	Number of Cats
Rehomed or in process (CAF)	17
Adopted by residents into their homes	13
Pending registration:	
• Earmarked for rehoming	5
• Pending registration with residents	10
Kittens due for desexing once of age	3
Transferred to another rescue	1
Deceased	1
Yet to be caught	1
Total cats	51

The majority of desexing was completed within just two months—an exceptionally fast turnaround. This level of efficiency would not have been possible without the strong involvement of local residents, who mobilised to assist with trapping, transport, and care. This site is a powerful example of how transformative free desexing programs can be. It also highlights the critical role that positive community engagement plays in achieving successful outcomes.

Large sites (with more than 25 cats) are relatively uncommon, accounting for only 3 out of the 13 sites. The smaller sites have an average of 9 cats each. A common scenario involves residents choosing to adopt the adult cats while allowing CAF to rehome the kittens. For instance, at one site with 8 cats, the resident has adopted four (now registered in their name), while the remaining four kittens are already in care and will be rehomed by CAF.

The project also plays a vital role in preventing situations from escalating. For example, one site began with just two cats in care, but within less than two years, the population grew to 19. Ongoing timely intervention will reduce cats in their care back to two, desexed and registered. The remainder will be rehomed through CAF.

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Funding free desexing has a transformative impact on stabilising and reducing undesexed cat populations. It also provides a fast-track to increasing ownership rates and improving ongoing cat management. While the direct impact on wildlife and nuisance behaviours is difficult to quantify at this early stage, it is expected to be positive given the high number of cats desexed and rehomed through the program.

We are deeply grateful to the Salisbury Council team for their support in enabling us to demonstrate the significant benefits such initiatives can achieve. This model is replicable and can be adopted by other councils, even in the absence of collaboration with a local cat rescue, provided there is a supportive veterinary partnership and a small network of dedicated foster carers.

The project is scheduled to continue into the next financial year.

What does the research say?

This project's early results are akin to the Banyule City Council in Victoria which launched a free cat desexing, microchipping, and registration program in 2013. Free transport was offered to residents needing assistance. Stray cats being fed by locals were enrolled in the program and became registered as owned pets.

Over eight years, across the city, impoundments dropped by 66%, euthanasia by 82%, and cat-related complaints by 36%. The program delivered significant savings, costing the council \$77,490 and generating an estimated \$440,660 in avoided costs.¹

Another example is a study evaluating the effectiveness of a Community Cat Program implemented in a small rural town in Ipswich, Queensland, which had high rates of cat impoundments. The program offered free desexing, microchipping, and preventative veterinary care for all cats—owned, semi-owned, and unowned. It was initiated by the Australian Pet Welfare Foundation in collaboration with RSPCA Queensland and the Animal Welfare League Queensland.

Data from 2017 to 2023 were analysed to assess the program's impact on local shelter intakes and outcomes. By the third year, the program was associated with a 60% drop in cat intakes, an 85% reduction in euthanasia, and a 39% decline in cat-related council complaints.²

In addition, a third study highlights that these kind of programs help strengthen cooperation between local authorities and the community.³ This has also been reflected at some sites, where residents who were previously apprehensive about the Council are now expressing appreciation for its support.

Midnight and Mars, both kittens from the large site with over 50 cats, have now been adopted.

DETAILS:
Midnight, male,
est dob 02-12-24,
Adelaide, SA

VET WORK:
Desex, Microchip
and Vaccination
included

GOOD WITH:
Children, Cats
and Dogs

NOTES:
Midnight is an
energetic boy who
loves pets and
climbing!

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ADOPT ME



ADOPTED

MIDNIGHT

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DETAILS:
Mars, female,
est dob 11-12-24,
Adelaide, SA

VET WORK:
Desex, Microchip
and Vaccination
included

GOOD WITH:
Children and Cats,
Untried with Dogs

NOTES:
Mars is a cheeky
playful girl that loves
to pounce any chance
she gets!

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ADOPT ME



ADOPTED

MARS

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¹ Cotterell et al. (2024) Impact of a Local Government Funded Free Cat Sterilization Program for Owned and Semi-Owned Cats

² Rand et al. (2024) Outcomes of a Community Cat Program Based on Sterilization of Owned, Semi-Owned and Unowned Cats in a Small Rural Town

³ Cotterell, Rand & Scotney (2025) Urban Cat Management in Australia—Evidence-Based Strategies for Success