



REACHING OUT TO THE *Community*

6TH NATIONAL G2Z SUMMIT & WORKSHOPS
14-19 SEPTEMBER 2015, MANTRA ON VIEW HOTEL, GOLD COAST



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Cynthia (Cindy) Karsten, DVM – graduated from the University of Wisconsin School of Veterinary Medicine in 2010 and went on to complete a shelter medicine internship at Colorado State University. She finished her Shelter Medicine Residency at UC Davis in 2014 and is now the LazinAlive Outreach Veterinarian with the UC Davis Koret Shelter Medicine Program where her role is to advise shelters, perform focused and comprehensive shelter consultations and present at conferences and universities. Dr. Karsten's interests include infectious disease control, population management and community/international medicine. Dr. Karsten lives with her 5 shelter dogs (weights 7, 9, 10, 12 and 50 pounds), 1 stray cat and an exceptionally supportive husband.

Abstract

Million Cat Challenge – Because Every Cat Counts!

Each year, millions of cats lose their lives in animal shelters. An enormous amount is invested in the capture, holding, and euthanasia of these animals, and the emotional toll exacted by their death is incalculable.

Finally, the opportunity for a “cat revolution” is at hand. It is now known that euthanasia of healthy cats in shelters can be replaced with programs that are dramatically more humane and effective for cats and communities alike. Shelters everywhere are hungry for this change.

The Million Cat Challenge is a shelter-based campaign to save the lives of 1 million cats in North America over the next five years. The core strategy of the campaign will be five key initiatives that will offer every shelter, in every community, practical choices to reduce euthanasia and increase live outcomes for shelter cats. These five key initiatives are alternatives to intake, managed admissions, capacity for care, removing barriers to adoptions and return to field.

Full Presentation

For well over a century, the influx of cats to North American shelters has greatly exceeded collective capacity to provide humane care and find adoptive homes. Although spay/neuter and other public education initiatives have dramatically reduced intake and euthanasia across the continent, achieving a precise balance between intake, capacity for humane care, and positive outcomes remains elusive for many shelters.



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Hundreds of thousands of cats still lose their lives to shelter euthanasia annually. In addition to the loss of cat lives, this continued euthanasia imposes great pain and cost to shelter workers, volunteers and society at large.

The Million Cat Challenge was born out of both deep optimism and a profound sense of urgency, which we believe is shared by stakeholders throughout the shelter system. The long-held assumption that cats and communities are best served by unchecked admission of cats, without regard to capacity for care or assurance of appropriate outcomes, is crumbling in light of new research, a new understanding of existing research, and, most importantly, programs demonstrating success in the field.

With this new understanding, the range of positive outcomes has expanded to include outreach to a wider pool of potential adopters as well as spay/neuter and return-to-origin for healthy un-owned cats.

Sweeping change for cats in North American shelters is within reach. It is already underway or accomplished at some shelters, while countless others are eager but need additional support or guidance to move forward.

The Million Cat Challenge encompasses five key initiatives to balance intake, humane capacity within the shelter, and live release:

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2. **Alternatives to intake:** Evaluating, for each cat, whether admission to the shelter versus stabilizing the cat in its current situation is a better choice for that individual cat, for the cats already in the shelter, and for the needs of the community as a whole. Providing community members with the tools to co-exist with, keep or rehome cats when admission to the shelter is not the best choice.
3. **Planned/scheduled intake:** For either open or limited intake shelters, planning and scheduling intake to assure humane care, allow for effective planning and staffing, and provide efficient, safe movement through the shelter system to an appropriate outcome for every cat.
4. **Capacity for care:** Assuring the Five Freedoms of animal welfare for all cats in the shelter, regardless of length of stay or outcome. Managing length of stay to provide this within facility and budget constraints and without utilizing euthanasia as a tool for population management.
5. **Removing barriers to adoption:** Expanding the pool of possible adopters by removing barriers to adoption such as cost, process or location.
6. **Shelter-neuter-return, aka return-to-field:** Sterilizing, vaccinating and returning healthy un-owned cats to the location of origin as an alternative to euthanasia.

These initiatives were chosen because they have the potential to create major impact and offer choices for shelters of any size, budget or intake type.

The five initiatives can be implemented separately or synergistically in any order. They can be implemented for only one cat, for a small pilot project, or in whole. Each step toward implementation, however small, will have value.

The over-arching goal of the five key initiatives is to give shelters the tools to evaluate, for each individual cat or kitten, whether intake to the shelter is the best choice given the options available for that shelter and community at that moment in time. Once a cat is admitted, the goal is to give shelters of any size and budget the tools to assure humane care, provide the Five Freedoms for animal welfare, and match each individual cat with the most appropriate outcome, whether that is adoption into a home or sterilization, vaccination and return to the location of origin.

We recognize that the initiatives within this campaign did not originate with the authors, nor will the campaign succeed without widespread participation. We hope to include national partners representing all major animal welfare, protection and animal control organizations. We also hope that the participants themselves will serve as a source of inspiration, mentoring and leadership on a local and regional level.



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In addition to providing informational resources around the five key initiatives, the Million Cat Challenge will serve as a central location to gather resources generated by partners and participants, document challenges, share success stories, and celebrate our collective progress toward the Million Cat goal.

Where did the idea for the Million Cat Challenge come from?

The Million Cat Challenge was inspired by the 100,000 Lives Campaign created by the Institute for Healthcare Improvement. The campaign was an initiative to reduce error-associated deaths and harm in hospitals by 100,000 over an 18 month period from 2005 to 2007.

Like shelters, many hospitals face a substantial gap between actual and ideal practices. The campaign leaders' description of the situation at the start of the campaign rings starkly familiar to many who work with animal shelters: "Our system, which intends to heal, too often does just the opposite — leading to unintended harm and unnecessary deaths at alarming rates."

Acknowledging room for improvement meant recognizing that currently some lives were lost due to avoidable errors, a daunting admission for many hospital administrators. At the same time, however, hundreds of hospitals across America were experiencing outstanding success, achieved by well-documented, practical methods that could be replicated across the country.

The 100,000 Lives Campaign allowed hospital administrators to join their peers in recognizing the need for change, preventing any one hospital from being singled out as inadequate and allowing each organization to share successes and strategies to overcome challenges.

The 100,000 Lives campaign was based on six key "best practices" supported by scientific evidence and with a proven track record in hospitals. Resources to support these practices were provided free of charge to participating hospitals. To join the campaign, hospital administrators simply filled out a one page form.

At the end of the campaign, participating hospitals reported acute-care inpatient mortality for the campaign time period, which was compared to the rate for the baseline year before the campaign was initiated. To calculate reduced harm, patient charts were reviewed from a representative subset of hospitals. At the end of the campaign, it was estimated that over 120,000 deaths had been prevented at participating hospitals.

Based on the initial success, the 100,000 Lives Campaign was extended to the 5 Million Lives Campaign, which expanded the original vision to include more participating hospitals and an additional six initiatives. More information about the 5 Million Lives Campaign is available at <http://www.ihl.org/Engage/Initiatives/Completed/5MillionLivesCampaign/Pages/default.aspx>.

The precursor to the Million Cat Challenge was born in Chico, California in December, 2012, at a small meeting at the city library attended by about a dozen shelter staff and managers. After learning about the 100,000 Lives Campaign, the group decided to commit to reducing euthanasia for cats in their shelters by at least 1000 by implementing one or more of several key initiatives over the coming year. They easily met and exceeded this goal.

The following year, Dr. Kate Hurley, Dr. Julie Levy and Jon Cicirelli (Director of the City of San Jose Animal Care and Services) issued the 100,000 Cat Challenge at the HSUS Animal Care Expo in May of 2013. Although no formal tracking system was put in place, shelters attending Expo pledged to reduce feline euthanasia by over 130,000 cats in the following year.

Based on this initial enthusiasm, Drs. Levy and Hurley decided to bring these informal efforts together into the Million Cat Challenge.





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What is the Million Cat Challenge NOT?

We acknowledge the critical importance of community-based initiatives such as accessible and affordable spay/neuter services; humane education; improved access to veterinary care; and programs to protect wildlife and public health. We also acknowledge the importance of finding solutions to feline overpopulation and free roaming cats on a broad scale.

However, the Million Cat Challenge is specifically a *shelter-based* campaign, focused on five key initiatives to help shelters respond as effectively and humanely as possible to the fraction of cats presented to the shelter in any given community. This focus is chosen because it lies within the direct and immediate purview of shelter administrators, and follows the model of the 100,000 Lives Campaign on which the Million Cat Challenge is modeled.

We believe, and the experience of numerous shelters has borne out, that balancing feline intake with each shelter's capacity for humane care and appropriate outcomes, will not only serve cats within the shelter better. It can also improve staff working conditions and morale; result in better care and outcomes for dogs as well as cats; enhance the shelter's standing in the community; and allow more effective use of resources. All these factors conspire to allow shelters to better address and solve the larger issues within communities, and allow us as a nation to better meet the needs of all animals and people.

How will the Million be counted?

The goal of the Million Cat Challenge is to save the lives of one million cats in North America over a five year period, from 2014-2019. Because the precursor to the Million Cat Challenge was issued in late 2012 and again in early 2013, 2012 has been chosen as the baseline year. This will recognize the progress made by "early adopter" shelters that will help mentor shelters joining the main campaign.

The million cats will be counted based on reduction in euthanasia at participating shelters compared to 2012. Owner-requested euthanasia will not be included in the baseline or comparison numbers, but other than that, all progress in reducing euthanasia will be counted, regardless of health or temperament status of the cat.

There is no minimum for participation; if a shelter is able to reduce euthanasia by even one cat that is an achievement to be celebrated as part of the Million Cat Challenge. For shelters that are already euthanizing few or no cats, another way to participate will be to document an increase in live release numbers over the baseline year of 2012. These two numbers (reduction in euthanasia and increase in life release) will be tracked separately as part of the million.

Shelters will initially "pledge" a goal of an estimated decrease in euthanasia or increase in live release. Data will be collected on a regular basis and reported in aggregate at the website www.millioncatchallenge.org.

We recognize that this method of data collection is not precise. Although specific case studies will be developed describing the impact of individual initiatives at specific shelters, it will not be possible to differentiate which progress results from which initiative on a broad scale. Some progress in reducing euthanasia or increasing adoptions reported by participating shelters will inevitably be related to factors other than the five core MCC initiatives (such as increased access to affordable spay/neuter services or community-based trap-neuter-return programs).

Conversely, some societal and demographic factors may blunt the beneficial impact of MCC initiatives implemented by shelters. The reduction by one million is an absolute rather than per capita figure. The U.S. population is certain to grow over the five years of the campaign, requiring a relatively greater reduction in per capita euthanasia to achieve numerical improvement over 2012.



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Other socioeconomic factors or loss of community based programs such as low cost spay/neuter or TNR could also blunt the positive impact of MCC initiatives.

Finally, some shelters may utilize resources available through the MCC but decline to participate in the Challenge, resulting in under-reporting of actual lives saved.

These issues notwithstanding, the authors firmly believe that the initiatives of the MCC will save the lives of at least a million cats over the next five years. And even a million lives represent only a fraction of the potential success contained in the MCC initiatives combined with the hard work and innovation of the leaders, staff, and volunteers in shelters today.

To learn more visit www.millioncatchallenge.org. While this is a North American initiative folks in other parts of the world can sign up for the newsletter and utilize all the resources of the website! And everyone is welcome to start their own branch of the challenge wherever they are saving lives.

The Power Point from this presentation will be made available to G2Z Summit attendees and questions can always be submitted to the presenter at clkarsten@ucdavis.edu.