



REACHING OUT TO THE *Community*

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



Jan McHugh-Smith

CAWA, BSc, BMu
President/CEO
Humane Society of the Pikes Peak Region

Jan McHugh-Smith is the President/CEO of the Humane Society of the Pikes Peak Region, an open-admission organization with two facilities serving 24,000 animals annually throughout Southern Colorado. HSPPR contracts with 10 cities and counties to provide Animal Care and Control services. Jan's animal welfare experience over the past 30 years also includes being President of the San Francisco SPCA, San Francisco CA; CEO of the Humane Society of Boulder Valley, Boulder CO; and Director of Eagle County Animal Control, Eagle CO.

Previously, Jan served on the American Humane Association Advisory Board, HSUS Companion Animal Advisory Committee, participated in developing the Asilomar Accords and is Vice Chair of Shelter Animal's Count, working create a national database for shelter statistics. She is the past Chair of the Society of Animal Welfare Administrators (SAWA), and served as Chair of CATalyst Council which works to raise the level of care and welfare for cats. Jan speaks on animal welfare issues at conferences all over the United States.

She is a Certified Animal Welfare Professional (CAWA), earned her Bachelors in Music at the University of Colorado, Boulder and a Bachelors of Science at Southern Connecticut State University.

Most importantly she shares her life with her husband, son and 4 wonderful shelter dogs.

Abstract

Return to Field Program for Community Cats

Cats are the most popular pet in America and this is evident when you look at shelter statistics. In the State of Colorado, intake of cats in shelters increased 32 percent. Lost, feral and outdoor cats are brought into the shelter by good Samaritans trying to find their owners. Sadly, only 4 of 10 cats in shelters are reunited or adopted. A Return to Field program provides opportunities to save the lives of community cats and strengthen the success of Trap Neuter Return Programs. Learn how to implement this program, work through objections, and safely return cats back where they were found.



REACHING OUT TO THE Community

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

Full Presentation

Summary:

When it comes to cats the only thing we agree upon is that there are a lot of them. How to manage cat population in the community and shelter can be controversial when it comes to Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR) and Return to Field (RTF) cat programs. In the USA, we estimate that 40-90 million cats live outdoors, with behaviors ranging from feral to a companion cat.

Return to Field is also known as Shelter/Neuter/Return or Feral Freedom. It started in Jacksonville Florida, 2008; the director of animal control wanted another way to help feral cats. He partnered with First Coast No More Homeless Pets to provide sterilization through a Best Friends grant. Animal Control picked up cats and took them directly to a surgery center where they were desexed, ear tipped, microchipped, and vaccinated. First Coast volunteers then returned them to the exact location where they were found and released the cats. Because all these cats had been euthanized in the past, this program had incredible impact decreasing euthanasia of cats in shelters.

The program is not without its controversy. Some feel this is cat abandonment or decreases the chances of a family being reunited with a lost cat. There is worry about the environmental impact on wildlife and cats nuisance complaints from the public. Because the program is new, where are the studies to show the released cats can survive? What has been proven is that this program is effective of decreasing euthanasia for cats in shelters.

Problem:

Return to Field programs generally desex, vaccinate, microchip and provide medical care if needed. Before the cat is returned, staff evaluates the neighborhood it came from, seeks input from the person (citizen) who brings the cat into the shelter, weighs the socialization and health of the cats as factors when determining where the cat should be placed (adoption, barn cat program, special needs/rescue or return to the neighborhood). RTF cats are transported by volunteers who take them to the place they were found. If requested the volunteer will work with the neighbors on how to use deterrents if a nuisance issue has been identified. In some programs shelters provide deterrents for the person with concerns.

Each agency needs to consider the comfort they have with returning cats to the field. Considerations include age of the animal, body condition, safety for the animal, animal suffering, neighborhood support, disease, nuisance complaints, impact on wildlife, weather related issues, resources to implement the program including desexing, evaluation of cats, and someone to return to field.

When a cat comes in to the shelter, the first work is to interview the person that brings in the cat. Staff uses a template to help with assessing the cat and the situation that brought the cat to the shelter. Staff notifies the person that the cat will be sterilized and brought back and assesses the human's reaction. Education is key; most people will accept RTF if given the proper information and understand that it is the shelter's decision.

Evaluation of the cat follows; what is the body condition of the cat? How does the cat behave? Is the cat a candidate for adoption or as a barn cat? Will the cat be safe if returned to the location based on the answers recorded in the template during intake? Is there an environmental impact on the return area? The Humane Society of the Pikes Peak Region (HSPPR) considers all of these things before releasing. The cat must be at least 4 months old, be in good body condition, test negative for feline leukemia/FIV, evaluation indicates that the cat is feral, semi-feral, and has been living outdoors. We assess if the client is neutral or is willing to continue care for the cat if returned. If bodily harm is indicated, the cat will not be returned. If the return address is an environmentally sensitive area the cat is not returned. HSPPR microchips cats so we can identify them if they are returned to the shelter.



REACHING OUT TO THE Community

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

Other RTF programs send cats immediately to surgery and are released. By-passing the shelter to decrease the risk of the cat getting sick in the shelter and this opens up cage space for adoptable cats. This is a best practice for RTF if your local/state laws allow. HSPPR has local laws that require cats be held for a minimum of 72 hours to give them a chance to be reunited with their families. This means they are scheduled for surgery on their fourth day in the shelter, we vaccinate on intake, but illness is a risk for the cats. If we are having outbreaks of a disease, we do not release cats.

One objection to this program is the accusation that Return to Field is cat abandonment. Once a cat comes into the shelter or rescue do we have a moral obligation to take care of the animals? How do we educate the public on keeping cats indoors while we release cats? On average in the United States 4 out of 10 cats in shelters make it out alive; there is a high risk of death for a cat in a shelter. Return to Field is based on the fact that the animals have been thriving while living outdoors in a specific area. If they are returned to this specific area, they can continue to access their resources of food and shelter. Agencies should check local and state laws to determine the definition of abandonment and get legal advice. A Colorado District attorney gave us the advice that we could return to field based on the facts that the cat was thriving and therefore should have resources for food, drink and protection from the weather.

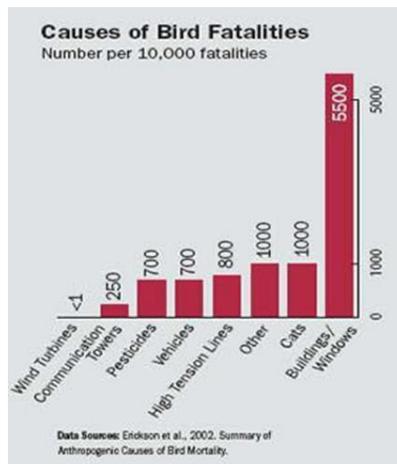
C.R.S. 18-9-202

COLORADO REVISED STATUTES

(1) (a) A person commits cruelty to animals if he or she knowingly, recklessly, or with criminal negligence overdrives, overloads, overworks, torments, deprives of necessary sustenance, unnecessarily or cruelly beats, allows to be housed in a manner that results in chronic or repeated serious physical harm, carries or confines in or upon any vehicles in a cruel or reckless manner, engages in a sexual act with an animal, or otherwise mistreats or neglects any animal, or causes or procures it to be done, or, having the charge or custody of any animal, fails to provide it with proper food, drink, or protection from the weather consistent with the species, breed, and type of animal involved, or abandons an animal.

Other concerns include the spread of disease in the community, but studies have shown the incident of Felv and FIP is low and similar to the percentage illness in owned cats. Rabies can be controlled through the vaccination of cats to be released and in the incidence of Rabies in Colorado is very low.

Cats are hunters and they have an impact on rodent and bird populations, but the greatest impacts on birds are building and windows. Being sensitive to areas where birds and small mammals are at risk is important, do not release in these areas.





REACHING OUT TO THE *Community*

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

There is concern about people not being reunited with their lost cats. In the USA only 1-2% of cats are reunited compared to 54% of dogs. One study found that lost cats were over 13 times more likely to be reunited with their owners by non-shelter means than by a visit or call to a shelter, with "returning home on their own" accounting for over 60% of found cats. 1 A cat has a better chance of finding his own way home than his family finding him at a shelter.

Conclusion:

Cat overpopulation cannot be solved by euthanasia and adoption alone as years of using these tools have not decreased the community cat population. With 80% of cats in households being sterilized, the majority of cats coming into shelters are community cats. Studies have shown that a combination of targeted Trap-Neuter-Return along with Return to Field can decrease the number of feral cats coming into the shelter and decrease cat euthanasia in the shelter. In Pueblo Colorado, kittens coming into the shelter were reduced by 44% in specific target area where TNR and RTF services were concentrated.

Reference:

<http://www.maddiesfund.org/feline-shelter-intake-reduction-program-faqs.htm>

Lord, L.K., et al., Search and identification methods that owners use to find a lost cat. J Am Vet Med Assoc, 2007. 230(2): p. 217-20. - See more at: <http://www.maddiesfund.org/feline-shelter-intake-reduction-program-faqs.htm#24>