

## **Trap-Neuter-Return program report: November 1, 2010-October 31, 2011**

Submitted by:

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### **Program overview**

The Trap-Neuter-Return program at the Wisconsin Humane Society (WHS) provides training and veterinary services for community members caring for feral cats. Cats who are brought in by approved caregivers are evaluated for temperament. Cats who are social and healthy are placed in the Wisconsin Humane Society's adoption program; approximately one in eight cats brought through the program meets that criteria and is placed into the adoption program. WHS tests cats who show signs of disease for Feline Leukemia and Feline Immunodeficiency Virus (FIV) and humanely euthanizes cats with positive test results. Healthy feral cats are sterilized, vaccinated, microchipped, ear-tipped and returned to the caregiver for continued care and monitoring.

From November 1, 2010 to October 31, 2011, the Wisconsin Humane Society spayed or neutered 138 cats for 44 City of Milwaukee caregivers.

### ***Impact: Year one data analysis***

Milwaukee's TNR program is already demonstrating a reduction of the number of cats in managed colonies (see full data report attached). From November 2010 to October 2011, the number of City of Milwaukee caregivers more than doubled from 20 to 44, and managed colonies rose from 19 to 38. The average colony size was significantly reduced - from 9.26 cats per colony to 5.76 cats.

The number of cats who left their colony is 103. Of these:

- 52 were adopted into homes through the Wisconsin Humane Society's adoption program or privately through the caregivers' networks.
- 12 died.
- 39 left their colonies for unknown reasons.

The program also resulted in a notable increase in the rate of spay/neuter in managed colonies. At the beginning of November 2010, approximately 21.6% of male feral cats and 26.9% of females were sterilized. By October 31, 2011, the rate jumped to 61.7% of males and 59.8% of females respectively, more than a 200% increase from the prior year.

Increased sterilization rates result in fewer free-roaming cats born into the community. Female cats can become pregnant at as young as four months and have two or three litters a year. A 2005 study of feral cats found that females produce an average of 1.4 litters per year, with an average 3.5 live births per litter.<sup>1</sup> Based on the data reported by caregivers on November 1, 2010, we estimate there were 64

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<sup>1</sup> Nutter, F. B. 2005. Evaluation of a trap-neuter return management program for feral cat colonies: population dynamics, home ranges, and potentially zoonotic diseases. PhD dissertation, North Carolina State University. Raleigh, NC.

unspayed adult females in the colonies.<sup>2</sup> Assuming average reproduction rates, if these females had not been sterilized through the Trap-Neuter-Return program, they would have produced 313 kittens by the end of the year. Surviving kittens would have gone on to have litters of their own, resulting in an even higher population. Instead, because of the sterilization and adoptions that occurred through the Trap-Neuter-Return program, the number of cats per managed colony actually decreased.

### *Additional program updates*

- **Neighbor concerns.** When a caregiver applies to be a part of the program, the Wisconsin Humane Society and the Department of Neighborhood Services work together to notify neighbors within 200 feet of the colony. The Wisconsin Humane Society sends information one week prior to the City notification to provide neighbors with general information about the program, as well as online resources that answer frequently asked questions and a phone number to call with additional questions or concerns. The notification sent by the Department of Neighborhood Services provides Wisconsin Humane Society staff's contact information so that WHS can help field calls from concerned neighbors.

The Wisconsin Humane Society is happy to work with neighbors to resolve concerns or complaints before or after a colony is approved. Wisconsin Humane Society staff, including Executive Director Anne Reed, met with a group of neighbors at their home to discuss their concerns about an already approved colony.

Since the start of the program, the Wisconsin Humane Society has fielded around 50 calls from concerned neighbors, the majority of whose concerns we were able to answer or resolve. We have been most successful when neighbors have questions or specific concerns (e.g. a cat using their garden as a litter box) that we can work to resolve by working with the neighbor and the caregiver. In many instances, we have worked out a solution that worked for both the caregiver and neighbor. If neighbors are philosophically opposed to the program and are not persuaded by new information, we direct them to follow the process set forth by the ordinance. Those neighbors often write to the Department of Neighborhood Services in opposition of the colony or to request a hearing.

The Milwaukee Area Domestic Animal Control Commission (MADACC) has helped address neighbor concerns when the Wisconsin Humane Society and the Trap-Neuter-Return program have not been able to do so. For example, MADACC recently helped with a situation in which a caregiver was removed from the Wisconsin Humane Society's program because she was not working with WHS to resolve neighbor concerns and had not submitted data about her colony. The Department of Neighborhood Services worked with MADACC to trap the cats.

- **Program removals.** Caregivers have been removed from the program per the process outlined by the ordinance or the sponsor organization. The Department of Neighborhood Services has held 13 hearings per request of neighbors, of which two resulted in a ruling in favor of the caregiver. The other 11 caregivers were removed from the Wisconsin Humane Society's program

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<sup>2</sup> This estimate assumes that half of the unknown gender cats reported were female.

after the hearing. The Wisconsin Humane Society removed four additional caregivers for failure to follow program guidelines.

- **Changes and improvements.** Adjustments have been made to the program in its inaugural year by both the City and sponsor. Below are some of the concerns and changes that have been implemented to address them:
  - *Program removals were not initially communicated back to the Department of Neighborhood Services.* The Wisconsin Humane Society implemented a new protocol to ensure that the Department of Neighborhood Services will receive a copy of termination notifications going forward.
  - *Some concerned neighbors were opting to call the Department of Neighborhood Services rather than the Wisconsin Humane Society.* The Department of Neighborhood Services added the Wisconsin Humane Society's contact information to the notification they send to neighbors.
  - *Aldermen were not aware of the colonies in their district.* An amendment was proposed and passed that requires that aldermen receive notification when a new colony is proposed in their district.
  - *Some neighbors did not understand the process to object to a colony.* The Department of Neighborhood Services clarified the process of requesting a hearing in the notifications they send.
  
- **Communication.** The Wisconsin Humane Society and Department of Neighborhood Services have remained in close contact regarding colonies in the program. In many cases, the two organizations have been able to work together to resolve problems or potential problems. The Wisconsin Humane Society is grateful for the Department of Neighborhood Services support, professionalism, and flexibility as we've launched this new program.

### ***Training and process***

The Wisconsin Humane Society has a strong training program and screening process in place for potential caregivers. Interested community members must attend an hour-long orientation at the Wisconsin Humane Society to join the program. At orientation, caregivers are provided with an overview of the Wisconsin Humane Society's program and a copy of the City ordinance. In order to become a caregiver, orientation attendees must meet the following requirements:

- Sign and agree to the Wisconsin Humane Society's program guidelines.
- Provide proof of home ownership or property owner permission form.
- Have no significant property violations at the colony site.
- Pass a quiz about Trap-Neuter-Return ordinance and program guidelines.
- Successfully complete a phone screen to ensure that they understand the ordinance and are willing to work with neighbors to resolve conflicts.
- Complete monthly reports about their colony to provide WHS with critical program data.

After caregivers demonstrate the outlined qualifications, the Wisconsin Humane Society and Department of Neighborhood Services send notifications to neighbors within 200 feet of the colony.

## **Background**

### ***Program purpose: Overview of the problem***

This section provides an overview of Trap-Neuter-Return and how it works to address concerns about feral cats in our community. The Wisconsin Humane Society believes that cats and other domesticated animals belong indoors. Unfortunately, our community has a large population of feral cats. Feral cats are often many generations removed from human ownership and cannot be placed into a typical home situation. Outdoor cats are the source of hundreds of citizen complaints each month. The behaviors of unaltered cats, such as spraying, yowling and fighting can have an impact on the quality of life in Milwaukee.

There are three approaches to dealing with feral cats in urban communities like Milwaukee:

- **Do nothing.** Ignoring the problem allows the free-roaming cats to breed and the population to increase.
- **Trap and Euthanize.** This method has proved to be ineffective and is expensive for taxpayers. When cats are removed from an area, research shows that other cats move in and breed prolifically, quickly forming a new - and sometimes larger - colony. Limited animal control resources and public resistance hinder the success of this strategy. The public does not support euthanasia of feral cats; a recent Harris poll showed that 81% of people polled would prefer to leave a free-roaming cat where it is than to have that cat caught and euthanized.
- **Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR).** Of the options available, TNR is the most viable and effective in an urban environment like Milwaukee. Through TNR, caregivers humanely trap feral cats and have them sterilized and vaccinated. Socialized cats are adopted into homes, and cats who are truly feral are returned to their original location where they are fed, sheltered and continuously monitored by a caregiver. TNR is the only method that has shown considerable impact on feral cat populations.

### ***Benefits of Trap-Neuter Return***

- **Reduces the number of free-roaming cats in the community.** Since TNR-friendly legislation was passed in Indianapolis in 2005, the city has saved nearly \$300,000 in costs associated with trapping and euthanizing feral cats. Additionally, there has been a 37% drop in cat intake and a 29% decrease in euthanasia.
- **Reduces nuisance complaints.** The majority of quality of life complaints regarding feral cats are related to mating behaviors. Trap-Neuter-Return reduces or entirely eliminates nuisance behaviors, such as spraying, fighting, and yowling.
- **Increases public health.** TNR helps to control the spread of disease by providing a rabies vaccine to cats who would likely not otherwise be vaccinated. Additionally, the health of the colony is continuously monitored by caregivers and unhealthy cats are removed from the colony.
- **Saves taxpayer dollars.** The average cost to trap, hold for a mandatory waiting period, and euthanize a cat is much greater than the cost to trap, sterilize, and vaccinate the cat. For example, in Orange County Florida the cost to euthanize a free-roaming cat is \$105, as opposed to \$56 to provide sterilization services. The Wisconsin Humane Society's average cost per surgery is \$50. Through the Community Cat Caregivers program, the Wisconsin Humane Society and private caregivers cover the cost of TNR services, saving taxpayer dollars.