

Rethinking Cat Management Strategies

Rationale and recommended practices

Kate Hurley, DVM, MPVM, Dip. ABVP (Shelter Medicine Practice)

www.sheltermedicine.com

sheltermedicine@ucdavis.edu



MILLIONS OF CATS



Cats in Fresno County (including city)

- ~ 190,000 pet cats
 - ~ 60% indoors
 - > 80% spayed/neutered
- ~ 140,000 community cats
 - 100% outdoors
 - < 5% in colonies

Historical pathways



Return to owner

Adoption

Humane euthanasia

Suffering, painful death
and/or posing
unacceptable problems or
risks out in the community

Important difference between cats and dogs

Fewer than
1 in 10 cats
recovered
by a call or
visit to a
shelter

Search and identification methods that owners use to find a lost cat

Linda K. Lord, DVM, PhD; Thomas E. Wittum, PhD; Amy K. Ferketich, PhD; Julie A. Funk, DVM, PhD; Päivi J. Rajala-Schultz, DVM, PhD

Objective—To characterize the process by which owners search for lost cats and identify factors associated with time to recovery.

Design—Cross-sectional study.

Sample Population—Owners of 138 cats lost in Montgomery County, Ohio, between June 1 and September 30, 2005.

Procedures—A telephone survey was conducted.

Results—73 of the 138 (53%) cats were recovered; median time to recovery was 5 days (range, 0.5 to 81 days). Most cats (48 [66%]) that were recovered returned home on their own or were found in the neighborhood (5 [7%]); most other cats were recovered through posting of neighborhood signs (8 [11%]) or calling or visiting an animal agency (5 [7%]). The highest success rate for any of the search methods that were used was only 12% (posting neighborhood signs). Only 26 of the 138 (19%) cats had some type of identification at the time they were lost (ie, identification tag, rabies tag, or microchip). Owners allowed 82 (59%) cats to spend at least some time outdoors. The percentage of sexually intact cats recovered by their owners (4/16 [25%]) was significantly lower than the percentage of neutered cats recovered (69/122 [57%]).

Conclusions and Clinical Relevance—Results suggest that the percentage of lost cats recovered by their owners is low, possibly in part because of the lack of use of traditional identification methods and the general acceptance that cats may roam. Veterinarians can help educate owners about the importance of identification and the need to keep cats indoors. (*J Am Vet Med Assoc* 2007;230:217–220)

Cats have surpassed dogs as the most popular pet in the United States, with American households owning an estimated 72 million cats in 2002.¹ Even more so than dogs, cats that stray from their homes are at risk for injury and death. Given the emotional attachment that many owners have to their pets, having a cat stray from its home may be particularly stressful to the owner.

Various methods have been used to reunite stray cats with their owners (eg, identification tags and microchips) or to recover cats that have strayed (eg, placing an advertisement in the newspaper, posting signs in the neighborhood, and contacting local animal shelters). However, the effectiveness of these various methods in the recovery of lost cats has not been evaluated. The purposes of the study reported here, therefore, were to characterize the process by which owners search for lost cats and identify factors associated with time to recovery. The present study was performed at the same time as a similar study² of the methods owners use to search for lost dogs.

From the Department of Veterinary Preventive Medicine, College of Veterinary Medicine (Lord, Wittum, Rajala-Schultz), and the School of Public Health (Ferketich), The Ohio State University, Columbus, OH 43210; and the National Food Safety and Toxicology Center, 165 Food Safety and Toxicology Building, East Lansing, MI 48824-1302 (Funk).

Supported by the Kenneth A. Scott Charitable Trust, a KeyBank Trust.

Presented in part at the Conference of Research Workers in Animal Diseases Annual Meeting, St Louis, December 2005.

Address correspondence to Dr. Lord.

JAVMA, Vol 230, No. 2, January 15, 2007

Materials and Methods

Location of study—The study was conducted in Montgomery County, Ohio, in 2005. At the time of the study, the county had approximately 550,000 residents,³ of which 160,000 resided in the city of Dayton,⁴ and a single major newspaper, the *Dayton Daily News*. The state of Ohio did not have any laws governing the control of cats at the time of the study, although individual municipalities did have the power to establish their own laws regarding cats. Five of the local municipalities in Montgomery County at the time of the study contracted with the county dog warden agency to handle stray cats in the municipality. Minimum holding period specified by most of the municipalities was 3 days. Two nonprofit humane societies in the county also handled stray and owner-surrendered cats. Together, the Montgomery County dog warden agency and 2 humane societies handled approximately 6,500 cats in 2005. All 3 agencies scanned incoming cats for microchips and implanted microchips in cats adopted from the agency.

Study population, sampling frame, and study design—The general methods of the study were similar to those described for a parallel study involving lost dogs.² The study population consisted of a cohort of cats that had been identified as missing by their owners through placement of an advertisement in the lost-and-found portion of the classified section in the *Dayton Daily News* or through contact with 1 of the

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Search and identification methods that owners use to find a lost dog

Linda K. Lord, DVM, PhD; Thomas E. Wittum, PhD; Amy K. Ferketich, PhD; Julie A. Funk, DVM, PhD; Päivi J. Rajala-Schultz, DVM, PhD

Objective—To characterize the process by which owners search for lost dogs and identify factors associated with time to recovery.

Design—Cross-sectional study.

Sample Population—Owners of 187 dogs lost in Montgomery County, Ohio, between June 1 and September 30, 2005.

Procedures—A telephone survey was conducted.

Results—132 of the 187 (71%) dogs were recovered; median time to recovery was 2 days (range, 0.5 to 21 days). Dogs were recovered primarily through a call or visit to an animal agency (46 [34.8%]), a dog license tag (24 [18.2%]), and posting of neighborhood signs (20 [15.2%]). Eighty-nine (48%) dogs had some type of identification at the time they were lost (ie, identification tag, dog license tag, rabies tag, or microchip). Owners had a higher likelihood of recovery when they called an animal agency (hazard ratio, 2.1), visited an animal agency (1.8), and posted neighborhood signs. Dogs that were wearing a dog license tag also had a higher likelihood of recovery (hazard ratio, 1.6). Owners were less likely to recover their dogs if they believed their dogs were stolen (hazard ratio, 0.3).

Conclusions and Clinical Relevance—Results suggest that various factors are associated with the likelihood that owners will recover a lost dog. Both animal agencies and veterinarians can play a role in educating dog owners on the importance of identification tags, licensing, and microchips and can help to emphasize the importance of having a search plan in case a dog is lost. (*J Am Vet Med Assoc* 2007;230:211–216)

Dogs and cats are enormously popular as companion animals in the United States. In 2002, it was estimated that 36% of American households owned dogs and 32% of American households owned cats.¹ Not only are dogs and cats popular, but their owners consider them part of the family. In the 2004 American Animal Hospital Association Pet Survey, 50% of respondents indicated they would choose a dog or cat as their sole companion if stranded on a desert island, and 56% said they would be very likely to risk their lives to save their pets.²

A pet that strays from its home can be at serious risk for starvation, injury, or death. Also, given the strength of the human-animal bond and the emotional attachment that many owners have to their pets, having a pet stray from its home can be traumatic and distressing for the owner. Thus, veterinarians may provide a benefit to both their patients and their clients by counseling pet owners on methods to prevent lost pets and effective means to ensure the rapid recovery of pets that do become lost. Traditionally, owners have identified

their pets with tags on the pets' collars and have placed advertisements in newspapers or searched local animal shelters to recover lost pets. Newer technology has led to the use of implanted microchip identification methods and Web sites devoted to finding and returning lost pets to their owners. However, the effectiveness of the various methods available for recovering lost pets has not been reported. The purposes of the study reported here were to characterize the process by which owners search for lost dogs and identify factors associated with time to recovery of lost dogs.

Materials and Methods

Location of study—The study was conducted in Montgomery County, Ohio, during 2005. At the time of the study, the county had approximately 550,000 residents,³ of which 160,000 resided in the city of Dayton,⁴ and a single major newspaper, the *Dayton Daily News*. At that time, each county in Ohio had a primary dog warden who was responsible for handling stray dogs,⁵ and dogs were required to wear a county dog license tag. The license tag had a number by which the county dog warden could identify the owner of the dog, and the county dog warden was required to hold all unlicensed stray dogs for 3 days and all licensed stray dogs for 14 days. Three major animal care and control agencies operated in Montgomery County at the time of the study: a dog warden agency that handled all stray dogs for the county as well as stray cats for some city municipalities, and 2 nonprofit humane societies that handled cats and owner-surrendered dogs and received reports

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Repeatable results

- Random digit dialed national survey of > 1,000 households
- Of households that had lost a cat, 75% were found
 - **1/54 by visit to shelter**
 - 48/54 by returning on their own or searching neighborhood

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Article

Frequency of Lost Dogs and Cats in the United States and the Methods Used to Locate Them

Emily Weiss ¹, Margaret Slater ^{2,*} and Linda Lord ³

¹ Shelter Research and Development, Community Outreach, American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA®), 6260 N. Hillside, Wichita, KS 67219, USA;

E-Mail: emily.weiss@aspc.org

² Shelter Research and Development, Community Outreach, American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA®), 50 Stone Ridge Drive, Northampton, MA 01602, USA

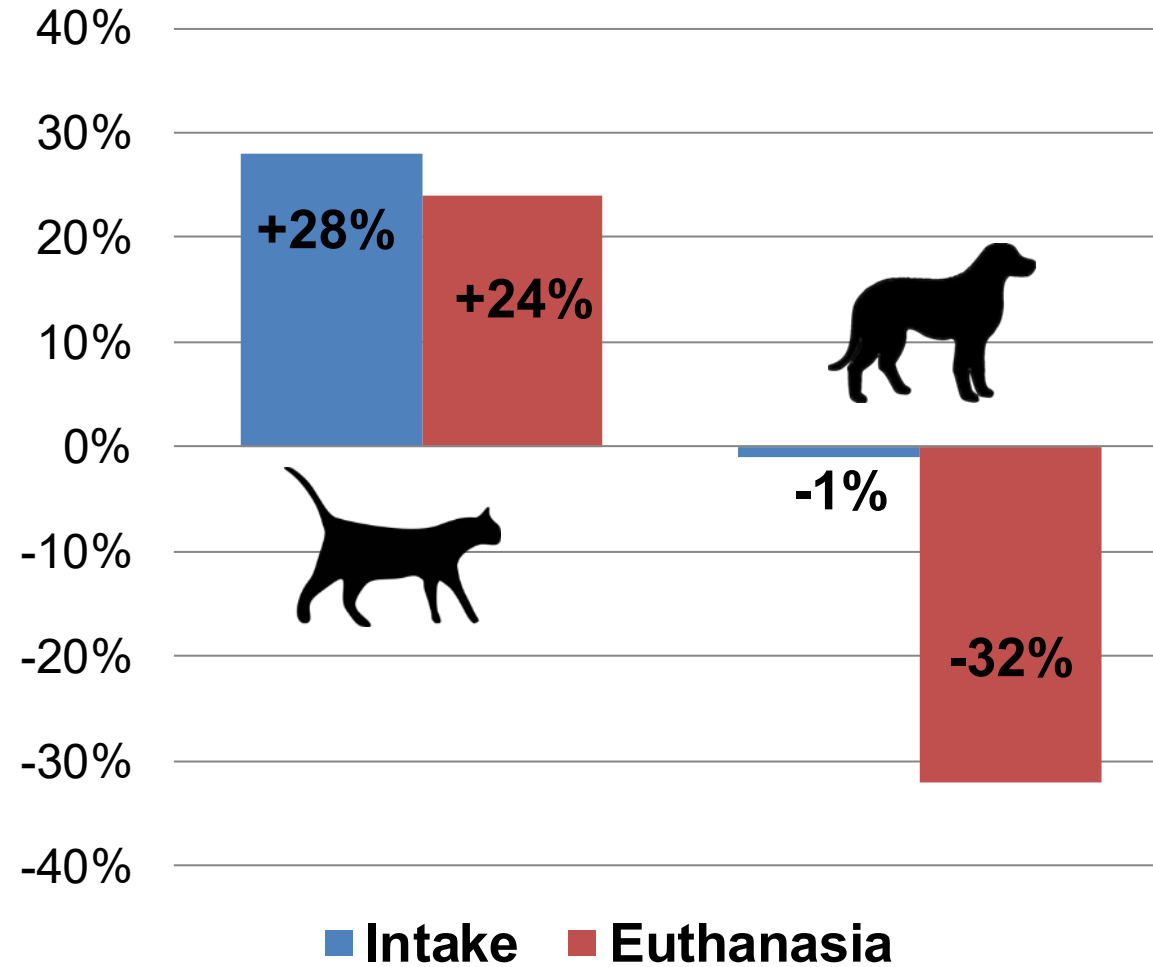
³ Department of Veterinary Preventive Medicine, College of Veterinary Medicine, The Ohio State University, Columbus, OH 43210, USA; E-Mail: linda.lord@cvm.osu.edu

* Author to whom correspondence should be addressed; E-Mail: margaret.slater@aspc.org;
Tel.: +1-217-855-8394.

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California 2000-2010



A different approach

Cats: San Jose shelter spays, releases strays

SAN JOSE

Carolyn Jones, Chronicle Staff Writer Published 4:00 am PST, Tuesday, January 3, 2012

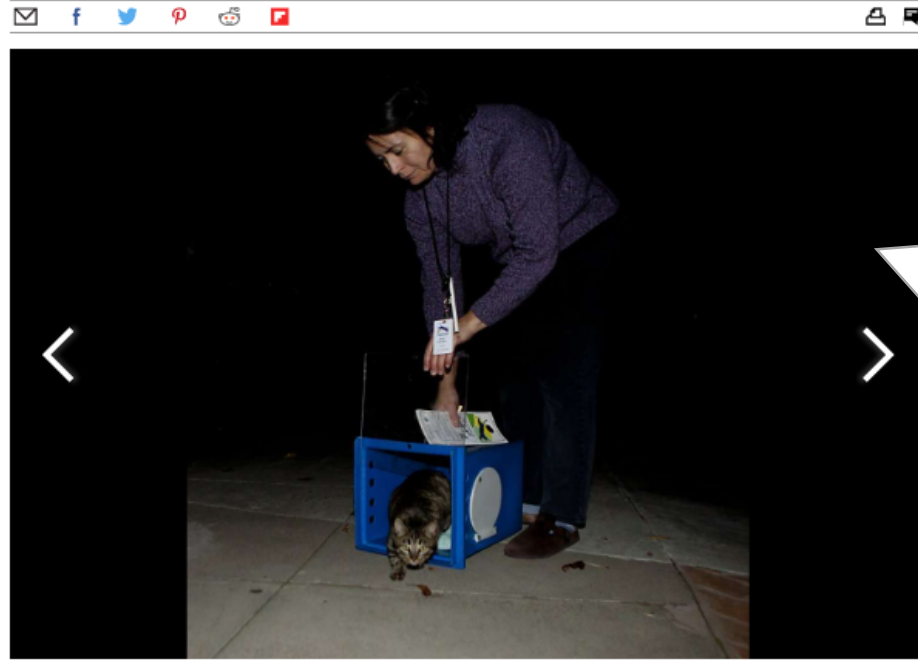


Photo: John Sebastian Russo, Special To The Chronicle

San Jose's animal shelter is among the first in the country to try a new approach to dealing with feral and stray cats. Instead of euthanizing those that aren't adoptable, the shelter spays or neuters them and releases them back to the vacant lot or back alley from which they came.

It worked!

**Study of the effect on shelter cat intakes
and euthanasia from a shelter neuter
return project of 10,080 cats from March
2010 to June 2014**

Karen L. Johnson¹ and Jon Cicirelli²

¹ National Pet Alliance, San Jose, CA, United States

² San Jose Animal Care and Services, San Jose, CA, United States

- Euthanasia **down 75%**
- Euthanasia due to URI **down 99%**
- Cats picked up dead **down 20%**
- Intake (cat and kitten) **down 29%**

TNR Diversion/Return to Field (RTF)

- Targets healthy adult cats (+/- older kittens)
- Sterilize, vaccinate, ear tip and return to location found
- TNR Diversion: bypass trip to shelter entirely
- RTF: outcome for cats brought to shelter



Repeatable results



- 11,749 cats sterilized and returned over 3-year period
- Euthanasia **down 84%**
- Calls for dead cat pickup **down 24%**
- Intake **down 38%**

TNR impact on complaint calls

DECREASES IN COMPLAINT CALLS IN RURAL MONTANA



84%
decline in
cat-related calls

Group: Thompson River Animal Care Shelter (TRACS)

Target area: The five towns located in Sanders County, MT (pop. 11,000; 2700 sq. miles)

Project: 755 spays/neuters of community cats from July 1, 2010 through July 1, 2012

Results: Cat-related calls to TRACS, the only animal shelter in the county, went from 1,032 in 2009 to 166 in 2011 (84% decline).

DECREASES IN COMPLAINT CALLS IN SUBURBAN TEXAS



90%
decline in
cat-related calls

Group: PETS Low Cost Spay and Neuter Clinic

Target area: Wichita Falls, TX (pop. 104,000)

Project: 1,188 spays/neuters of community cats from 2011 through 2012

Results: Community cat related complaint calls to Wichita Falls Animal Control went from 1,958 in 2010 to less than 200 in 2012 (at least 90% decline).

Why?

Effects of low-level culling of feral cats in open populations: a case study from the forests of southern Tasmania

Billie T. Lazenby^{A,B,D}, Nicholas J. Mooney^C and Christopher R. Dickman^A

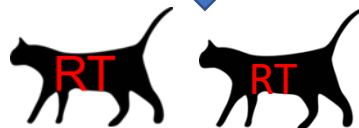
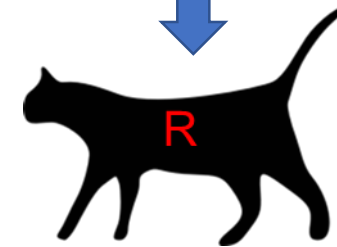
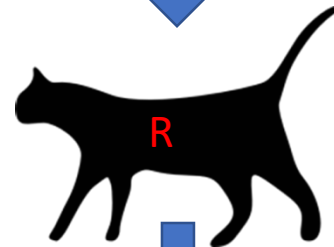
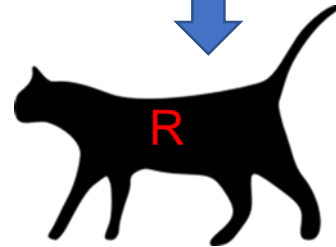
^ASchool of Biological Sciences, A08, University of Tasmania

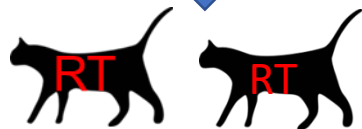
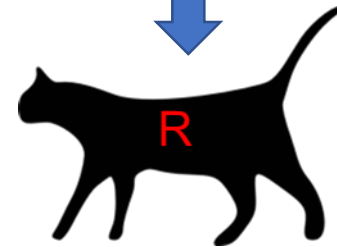
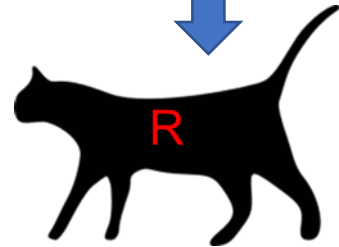
^BDepartment of Primary Industries, Parks, Water and Wildlife, Hobart, Tas. 7000, Australia.

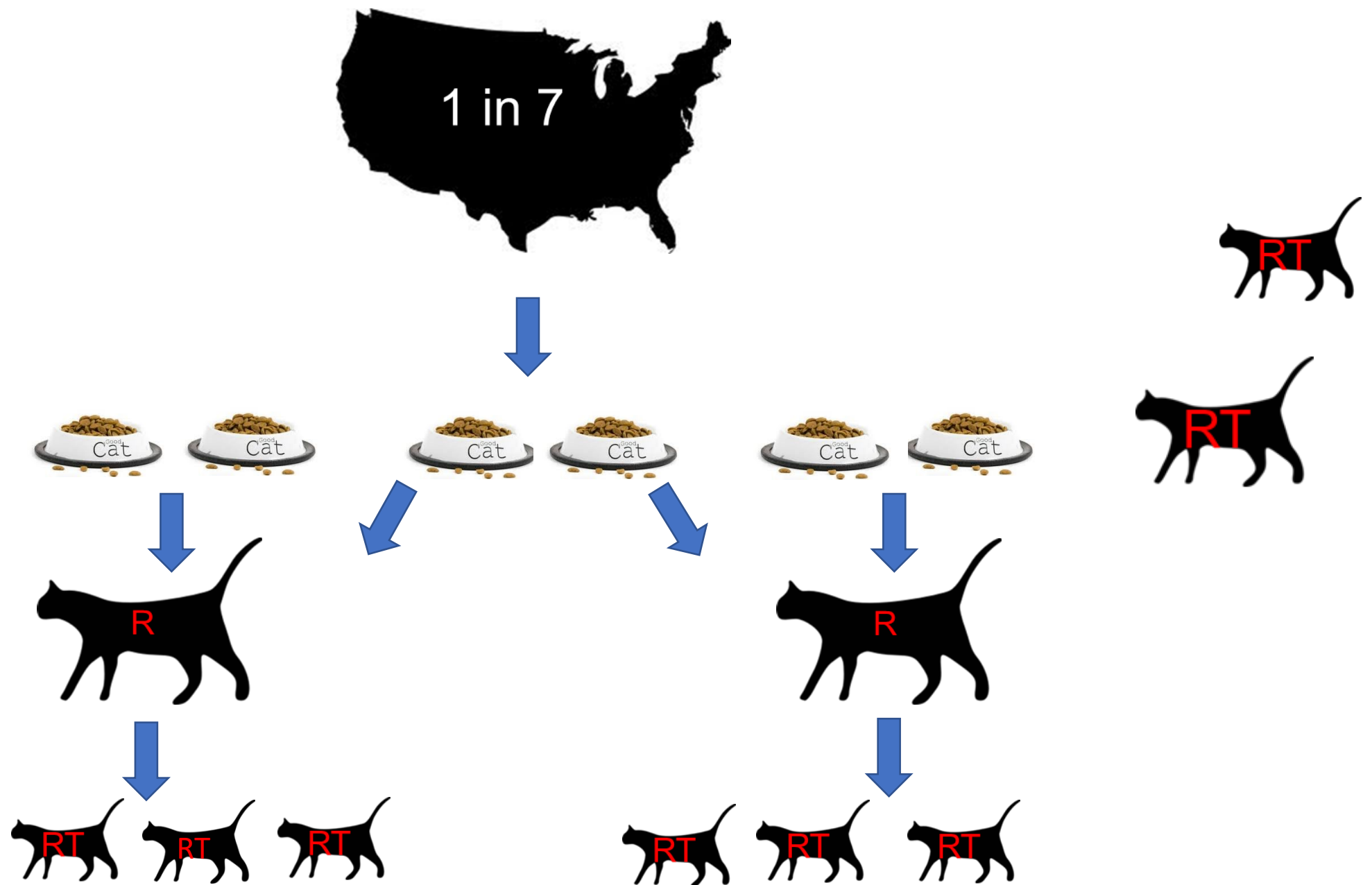
^CPO Box 120, Richmond, Tas. 7025, Australia

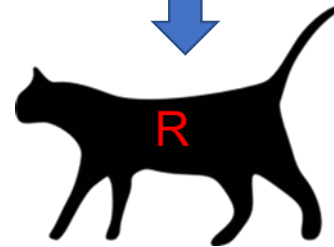
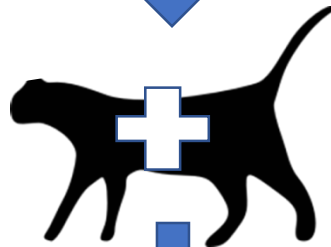
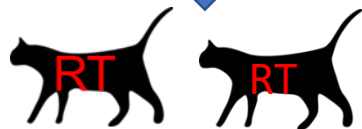
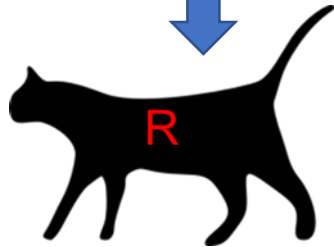
^DCorresponding author. Email: Billie.Lazenby@utas.edu.au

“Contrary to expectation, the relative abundance and activity of feral cats increased in the cull-sites, even though the numbers of cats captured per unit effort during the culling period declined. **Increases in minimum numbers of cats known to be alive ranged from 75% to 211% during the culling period, compared with pre- and post-cull estimates.**”









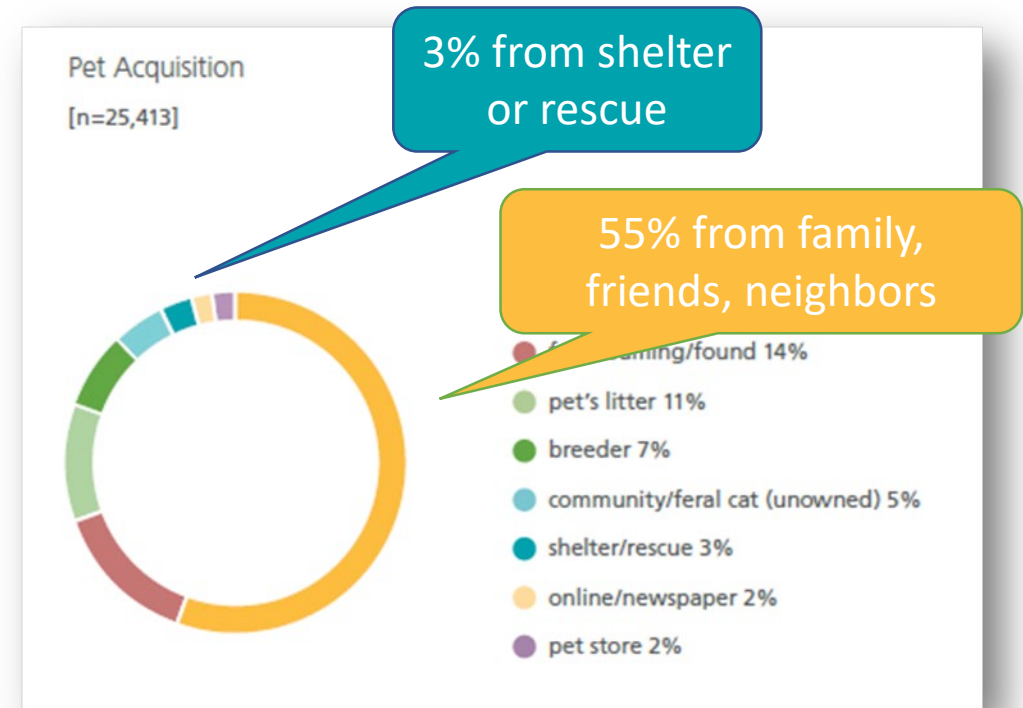
Rethinking how to be of service

- 1 in 6 people in America live in poverty
- 1 in 5 people in America speak a language other than English at home
- Cultural norms and expectations as well as access to services can vary
- > 90% of people in marginalized communities have never been to a shelter at all



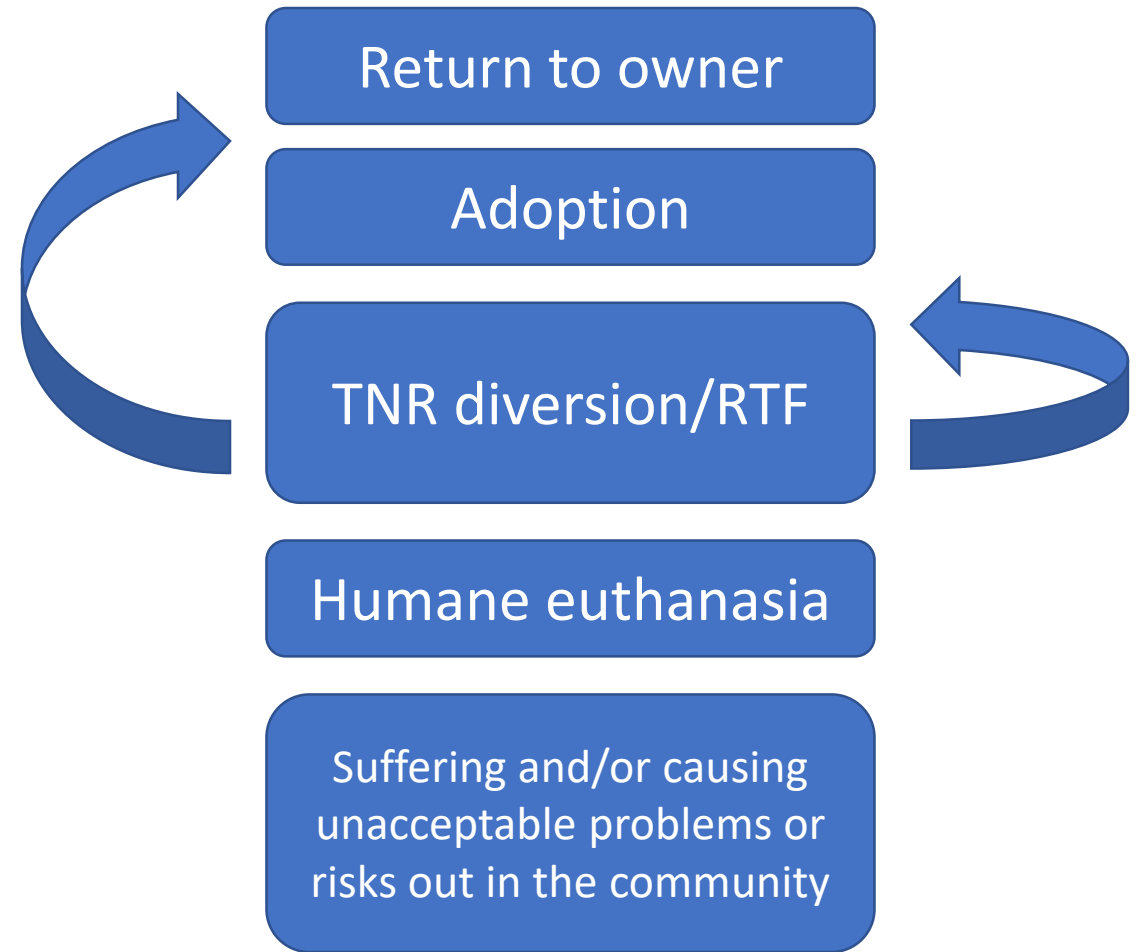
Keeping families together

- Most pets in marginalized communities adopted from a source other than a shelter
- Leaving cats in place keeps families and pets together
- TNR for friendly free roaming cats can close the loop on sterilization and vaccination



HSUS Pets for Life Report 2014

New understanding



What about when TNR is not available?

 American Veterinary Medical Association

Are we in a veterinary workforce crisis? | American

This has led to concerns voiced about a shortage of veterinary personnel and a workforce crisis. While it's true that demand for veterinary ...

1 week ago



 WTTV

Burnout fuels shortage in veterinary support positions, animal clinics working to still provide care

While the need is there, help is hard to come by. That's as animal clinics try are battling shortages in veterinary support staff ...




 KTLA

SoCal pet owners struggle to get appointments with veterinarians amid shortage

That's because there is a veterinarian shortage in the greater Los Angeles area, paired with increased pet adoptions during the pandemic.

2 weeks ago



 Q13 FOX

Vet clinics forced to reduce hours and services due to worker shortages

- Veterinary clinics have had to reduce hours and services across Washington due to the shortage of veterinarians and licensed technicians, and ...

1 month ago



Remember this

Effects of low-level culling of feral cats in open populations: a case study from the forests of southern Tasmania

Billie T. Lazenby^{A,B,D}, Nicholas J. Mooney^C and Christopher R. Dickman^A

^ASchool of Biological Sciences, A08, University of Tasmania

^BDepartment of Primary Industries, Parks, Water and Wildlife, Hobart, Tas. 7000, Australia.

^CPO Box 120, Richmond, Tas. 7025, Australia

^DCorresponding author. Email: Billie.Lazenby@utas.edu.au

“Contrary to expectation, the relative abundance and activity of feral cats increased in the cull-sites, even though the numbers of cats captured per unit effort during the culling period declined. **Increases in minimum numbers of cats known to be alive ranged from 75% to 211% during the culling period, compared with pre- and post-cull estimates.**”

DO NO HARM

Animal Control Intake of Free-Roaming Cats



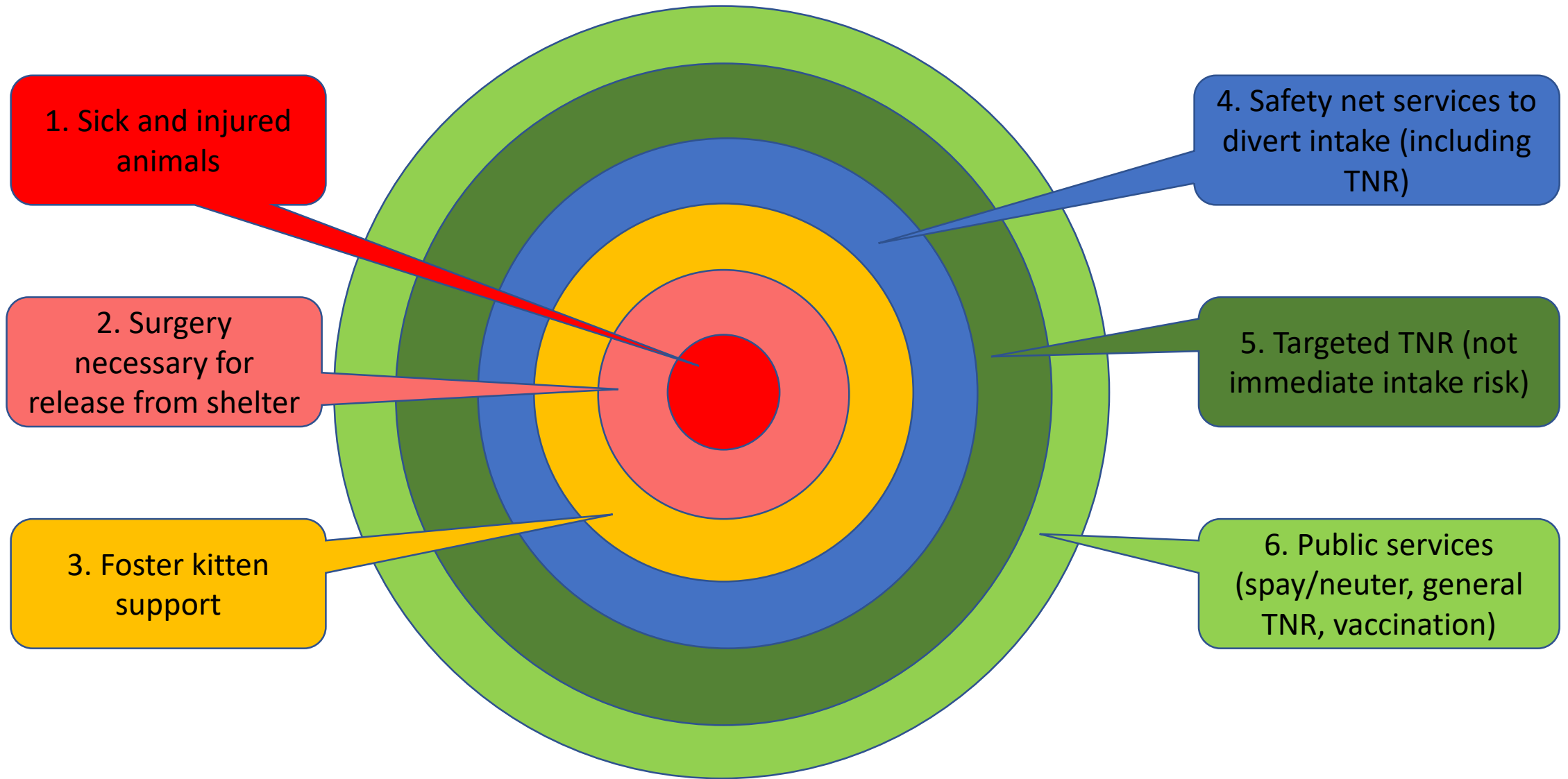
*The National Animal Care & Control Association
is committed to setting the standard of professionalism in animal welfare
and public safety through training, networking, and advocacy.*

Animal Control Intake of Free-Roaming Cats

It is the position [policy] of the National Animal Care & Control Association that, at every opportunity, officers should [will] work to educate the public regarding humane and responsible co-existence and care of pet and commu
vaccination; res
and effective m
It is the position
of temperamen
animal manag
should be avo



It is the position of NACA that **indiscriminate** pick up or admission of **healthy, free-roaming cats, regardless of temperament, for any purpose other than TNR/SNR, fails to serve commonly held goals** of community animal management and protection programs and, as such, **is a misuse of time and public funds** and should be avoided.

Shelter medical team triage



All the science

Rethinking the Animal Shelter's Role in Free-Roaming Cat Management

 Kate F. Hurley^{1*} and  Julie K. Levy²

¹Koret Shelter Medicine Program, School of Veterinary Medicine, University of California – Davis, Davis, CA, United States

²Maddie's Shelter Medicine Program, College of Veterinary Medicine, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL, United States

Substantial societal investment is made in the management of free-roaming cats by various methods, with goals of such programs commonly including wildlife conservation, public health protection, nuisance abatement, and/or promotion of cat health and welfare. While there has been a degree of controversy over some of the tactics employed, there is widespread agreement that any method must be scientifically based and sufficiently focused, intensive and sustained in order to succeed. The vast majority of free-roaming cat management in communities takes place through local animal shelters. Throughout the 20th century and into the 21st, this consisted primarily of *ad hoc* admission of cats captured by members of the public, with euthanasia being the most common outcome. In North America alone, hundreds of millions of cats have been impounded and euthanized and billions of dollars invested in such programs. Given the reliance on this model to achieve important societal goals, it is surprising that there has been an almost complete lack of published research evaluating its success. Wildlife conservation and public health protection will be better served when debate about the merits and pitfalls of methods such as Trap-Neuter-Return is grounded in the context of realistically achievable alternatives. Where no perfect answer exists, an understanding of the

<https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fvets.2022.847081/full>

