

#587 OUTCOMES ASSOCIATED WITH A COMMUNITY CAT PROGRAM BASED ON HIGH-INTENSITY STERILIZATION OF OWNED AND SEMI-OWNED CATS IN TARGET AREAS

J. Cotterell¹; J. Rand^{2,3}; Z. Ahmadabadi²

¹City of Banyule, Animal Management, Banyule, VIC, Australia; ²Australian Pet Welfare Foundation, Kenmore; QLD, ³School of Veterinary Science, University of Queensland, Gatton, QLD,

INTRODUCTION

- ❑ Outcomes for cats in municipal animal facilities and shelters are considerably worse than for dogs in most countries where straying and nuisance cats are impounded by authorities (1).
- ❑ Return to owner rates are usually much lower than for dogs, because few impounded cats are identified (1).
- ❑ Many stray cats in urban areas are semi-owned – they are provided regular food by people who do not perceive the cat is their property (2)
- ❑ Because of overcrowding in municipal facilities and shelters, timid or fearful cats and young kittens are often euthanized on admission (3)
- ❑ Euthanasia of animals, particularly healthy and treatable animals, has adverse effects on the psychological health of staff (4, 5)
- ❑ The City of Banyule implemented a high-intensity targeted free sterilization program for cats.
- ❑ The trigger point for this change was the impact on animal management staff forced to deliver a stray kitten to the contracted shelter. It was killed on admission because it was under 8 weeks of age.

OBJECTIVES

To assess the outcome of a contemporary community cat program based on a high-intensity free-sterilization program targeted to suburbs with high cat intake, euthanasia and cat-related complaints.

METHODS

- Free sterilization, microchipping and registration (licensing) of owned and semi-owned cats, targeted to 3 suburbs (pop 15,000), began in 2017-2018, in parallel with an existing city-wide, low-intensity, non-targeted program.
- The target suburbs had the highest calls related to found and nuisance cats per 1000 residents (11 vs 2 calls for other suburbs, Fig 1).
- The target suburbs were also the most SOE disadvantaged in the city, and had the highest proportion of government housing.
- Door-knocking and flyers were used to recruit entire cats.
- In the targeted suburbs, from 2017-18 to 2020-21, the number of cats sterilized per 1000 residents each year was 6.6, 2.3, 2.8 and 4.2 cats, respectively (Fig 2).

RESULTS

- ❑ In the 3 years after the targeted approach was instituted, cat impoundments from the whole city decreased from 4 cats/1000 residents to 1.2 cats per 1000 residents, and euthanasia from 0.8 to 0.2 cats per 1000 residents (Fig 2). Impoundments and euthanasia remained at this low level in the fourth year of the program (1.0 cats and 0.2 cats respectively).
- ❑ Sterilizing 7 cats/1000 residents in year 1 in the target suburbs, and decreasing to 2-4 cats/1000 residents in later years, resulted in measurable change after 12 mths, which plateaued in the 4th year (Fig 2).
- ❑ Cat impoundments decreased 70% over the first 3 years, resulting in reduced associated costs for the city.
- ❑ All semi-owners, including those caring for multiple cats, took ownership of the cats

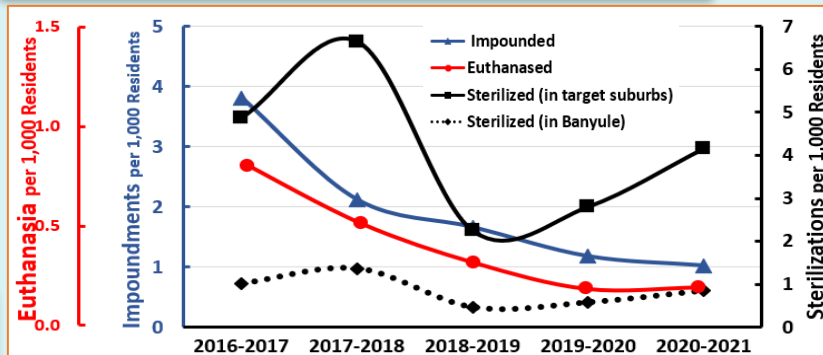


Fig.2 Impoundments, euthanasia and sterilizations per 1,000 residents for city (population: 130,000) and sterilizations/1,000 residents in target suburbs (population:15,000)

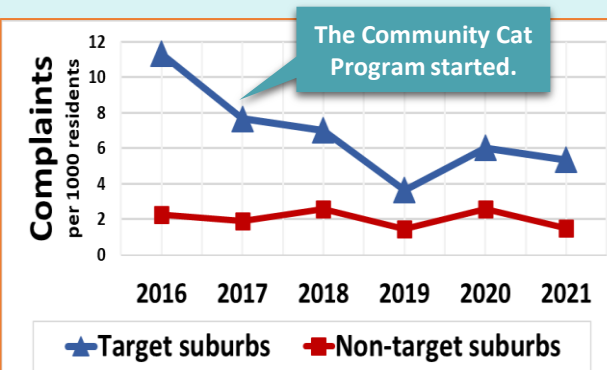


Fig.1 Calls related to found & nuisance cats/1,000 residents

CONCLUSION

- ✓ High intensity, free-sterilization programs are effective in reducing municipal impoundments of cats when targeted to areas of highest cat-related complaints, and cat owners and semi-owners recruited.
- ✓ Semi-owners will take official ownership of the cat they are caring for, including multiple cats, when offered free sterilization, microchipping and registration/licensing for cats.
- ✓ Free sterilization programs can save local governments money, and reduce exposure of staff to mental health damage from euthanizing cats and kittens

REFERENCES

1. Rand J, Lancaster E, Inwood G, Cluderay C, Marston L. Strategies to reduce the euthanasia of impounded dogs and cats used by councils in Victoria, Australia. *Animals* 2018; 8:100-134
2. Zito S, Vankan D, Bennett P, Paterson M, Phillips CJ. (2015). "Cat ownership perception and caretaking explored in an internet survey of people associated with cats". *PLoS ONE*, 10, e0133293.
3. Kerr, C., Rand, J., Morton, J., Reid, R. and Paterson, M. (2018) "Changes associated with improved outcomes for cats entering RSPCA Queensland shelters from 2011 to 2016". *Animals*, 8(6), 954.
4. Scotney, R.L., McLaughlin, D., Keates, H.L. A systematic review of the effects of euthanasia and occupational stress in personnel working with animals in animal shelters, veterinary clinics, and biomedical research facilities. *J. Am. Vet. Med. Assoc.* 2015, 247, 1121-1130.
5. Rohlf, V.; Bennett, P. Perpetration-induced traumatic stress in persons who euthanize nonhuman animals in surgeries, animal shelters, and laboratories. *Soc. Anim.* 2005, 13, 201-219