



Expansion of BARCS Community Cat Program

Project #
20-512

County: Baltimore City

Number of Cats Spayed:	1240	Number of Dogs Spayed:	0
Number of Cats Neutered:	1260	Number of Dogs Neutered:	0
Amount Received: \$87,500		Amount Remaining (to be returned to MDA): \$0	

Project Synopsis:

This Project targeted 2,500 community cats in Baltimore City and provided spay/neuter surgery for community cats trapped in Baltimore City. BARCS also vaccinated the cats for rabies and provided any medical care before being returned to their colonies.



Project Description:

We are so appreciative of the ongoing support from the Maryland Department of Agriculture for the large-scale TNR program at BARCS known as the BARCS Community Cat Program (BCCP)

There continues to be woefully few resources dealing with the enormous problem of outdoor cats in Baltimore City. In 2013, BARCS applied to Best Friends Animal Society and PetSmart Charities for grant funding for the TNR of 10,500 outdoor cats in Baltimore City over a 3-year period which launched our robust TNR program. Once that funding ceased, we are so grateful that the Maryland Department of Agriculture believed in our vital work and continued to fund this impactful program in Baltimore City.

With ongoing measurable success, even through COVID-19, our TNR program for 2020 experienced a 66% reduction in kitten intake, a 53% decrease in adult cat intake, and an astounding 81% reduction of feline euthanasia as compared to our baseline year of 2012.

Summary of Approach:

The BCCP program continues to grow in awareness, even in a COVID-19 year. Notwithstanding that BARCS had to prepare to clear out and then move all of the remaining animals in our old shelter as we prepared to move into our new City-built shelter on May 5, 2020. Then there were several months of ironing out all of the issues in our new building. Plus, we needed to stop TNR for only a couple of months while our surgery department was closed down. Nonetheless, during that time we were able to pivot our program into one that is even more successful for us and how we will continue to operate. Due to necessity, we had to rely more on our community trappers who stepped up to assist us both with trapping and transporting cats to and from BARCS. This enabled the two BCCP staff members (we used to have three but lost one due to lack of grant funding for the position in



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March 2020) to have more time to focus on helping the complainants, provide more education and deterrents, and answer more calls and emails for our help. Previously, most of their time was spent on trapping and driving through city traffic back and forth to BARCS to transport the cats. Similarly, also due to necessity, the BARCS medical team took over the care of the TNR cats after they were altered as many needed to spend several days at BARCS to recover from other illnesses or surgeries. This also helped to free up more time for the BCCP team who previously did most of the follow-up medical care, feeding, and cage cleaning. Our TNR program continues to train and recruit private citizens to help trap outdoor cat populations, which in turn helps Baltimore humanely control our outdoor cat population so there will be fewer cats over time. The program also reduces the number of cats euthanized by keeping them out of BARCS, minimizes nuisance behaviors, plus improves the health of cats and neighborhood relations.

In addition to managing the TNR and tracking of outdoor cat colonies in Baltimore City, the two BCCP employees teach community members the proper community cat care techniques and how to help control the colony population. Their fieldwork gives them the opportunity to provide humane education to pet owners in underserved areas of Baltimore City and directs them to our other free or low-cost resources to prevent unwanted litters and/or pet abandonment that contribute to the community cat population.

To reach the goal of 2,500 outdoor cats, the process is ongoing with trapping and spay/neuter surgery happening every week, when feasible. Working with the local trappers has helped to assure trapping continues efficiently. TNR is much more than just spay/neuter surgery-- each cat needs to have its information logged and a complete medical exam needs to be done with the results documented, plus each cat needs to be transported to BARCS for spay/neuter surgery and then returned to its colony the following day. Each cat is assessed for the best possible outcome, whether it is returned to its colony, or if it's friendly, intaked by BARCS for adoption, or placed in the BARCS Working Cat Program and placed in a business or barn to live its life out as a mouser. Those cats with medical issues are housed at BARCS while being cared for by the BARCS medical staff for as long as necessary. A significant component of this program is the trust that is built over time in each neighborhood by the BCCP team.

November - December 2019: After meeting the goal of our previous grant cycle at the end of October (with an extension) we immediately continued our work toward completing our goals for this grant cycle.

January - March 2020: While continuing with our project, in March the pandemic took hold in Baltimore and our program was curtailed. Additionally, we received news that one of the three BCCP positions was no longer going to be grant-funded and unfortunately we had to let one team member go, reducing the BCCP staff to two employees.

April - June 2020: This is the time when many of the BARCS programs were curtailed, including all surgery had stopped. It gave us the time to pivot our program and rebuild so that we could emerge successfully once we had a better understanding of how the pandemic restrictions would impact our shelter. This was the timeframe that we started cultivating our local trappers and recruiting them to help the cats and citizens in Baltimore City. It was met with great enthusiasm by the trappers who generously offered their assistance. We developed protocols so that trappers had a seamless process from the time the cats were trapped to placing them on the BARCS surgery schedule. Similarly, we worked with our staff to see how our animal care team could care for the recovering TNR cats in addition to the animals at BARCS.

On May 5th, BARCS moved into our new City-built facility in Cherry Hill and the zip code of our highest intake.

July - September 2020: Surgery slowly started back up but the medical team needed to first play catch-up and spay or neuter all of the adoptable pets sent home during the pandemic unaltered, as well as all of the animals in foster care, plus all of the redemptions. Once caught up, the BCCP was back on track. Working with the trappers was successful for this project, as was having the BARCS medical team provide any follow-up care to the TNR cats.



October- December 2020: We requested an extension to March 31, 2021, so we could meet the 2,500 cat goal. The Change of Scope was approved and we continued with our program.

January-February 2021: We were able to meet our goal a bit earlier than the extension deadline and altered 2,500 community cats by the end of February.

Accomplishments:

We are very proud of achieving the measurable success of a 66% reduction in kitten intake, a 53% decrease in adult cat intake, and an 81% reduction in feline euthanasia during 2020. Prior to 2012 and this large-scale complaint-driven TNR program, we saw no impact from TNR on our shelter's intake and euthanasia.

We also demonstrated our resiliency during a global pandemic to still reach our goal of 2,500 community cats. Even after losing one of our three BCCP team members, we still were able to successfully redesign our program to more heavily rely upon local trappers, rely on our medical staff to care for the recovering TNR cats, and free up the time for the BCCP team to be able to make a significant impact on our local community by building trust and relationships while solving the countless complaints about community cats from the citizens in Baltimore City.

BARCS was able to leverage the funding from the Maryland Department of Agriculture to obtain a \$12,000 grant from the Best Friends Animal Society to help underwrite a portion of the additional medical care (not including Spay/Neuter surgery) for 430 of the 2,500 community cats. In addition to providing antibiotics and other medications, our medical team performed enucleations, amputations, dentals with extractions, and wound and incision repairs. We also were able to purchase 30 much-needed new traps since we repaired many of our existing traps countless times until they were no longer functional.

Lessons Learned:

The most valuable lesson we learned is how flexible we are when facing a global pandemic. While we already had a successful TNR program, we always researched other TNR programs across the nation to see what possible tweaks we could make to our program. Best Friends Animal Society has always cited BARCS as a model TNR program, even sending other shelters to learn from us. When it was time to curtail our program due to COVID-19, we already knew from our research that it was time to try out the use of local trappers to do both the trapping and transporting for us. It was just a matter of making those connections and updating our procedures for how we would place the cats on our surgery schedule and assure that the transporting of cats was also seamless. As BARCS intake was somewhat reduced as a result of COVID-19, we had some available medical staff time to see if they were able to care for the TNR cats in addition to all of the shelter animals. It was a little challenging at first since we divided our staff in half during the pandemic to work four 10-hour days for safety reasons. However, everything successfully worked out and it is now how the BCCP will function going forward.

Attachments:

Spreadsheet listing all 2,500 altered community cats.

For More Information Contact:

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