



BARCS Community Cat Program

Project #
17-202

County: Baltimore City

Number of Cats Spayed:	1,515	Number of Dogs Spayed:	0
Number of Cats Neutered:	1,485	Number of Dogs Neutered:	0

Amount Received: \$90,000	Amount Remaining (to be returned to MDA): \$0
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Project Synopsis:

The BARCS Community Cat Program started in 2012 and targets outdoor cats living in the most impoverished neighborhoods of Baltimore City. For the 2016-17 grant period, the Maryland Department of Agriculture grant funded the spay/neuter surgery of 3,000 outdoor cats through our successful Trap, Neuter and Return (TNR) program.



Project Description:

The Baltimore Animal Rescue and Care Shelter (BARCS) is the largest animal shelter in Maryland. BARCS takes in 11,000 dogs and cats and approximately 1,000 exotic, wildlife, and other small mammals each year. BARCS serves as a resource to the community for citizens and their animals in need. In just a few years, BARCS significantly increased the number of animals saved from 240 dogs and cats in 2005 (under Animal Control) to over 9,000 dogs and cats saved in 2016. Since our inception in 2005, there has been a 3,200% increase in lives saved. The city-run shelter euthanized a heartbreaking 98% of the animals it received and now BARCS has reduced that to 12%.

BARCS serves as a resource to the community for citizens and their animals in need. The shelter's services include; providing housing and lifesaving care to homeless animals, public education and outreach, tracking lost and found pets, offering low cost vaccinations and microchip clinics, pet licensing, and the Trap, Neuter and Return (TNR) of community cats. BARCS also provides families the opportunity to adopt a loving companion animal that is spayed or neutered and vaccinated at BARCS.

To address the proliferation of unwanted animals that often become homeless, BARCS provides Spay/Neuter surgery for all of its adopted cats and dogs before they leave the shelter. But that is not nearly enough to stem the tide of continued live cat births adding to more unwanted pets in Baltimore City. BARCS was at the forefront of legalizing Trap, Neuter and Return (TNR) in Baltimore City. We initiated conversations about legalizing TNR with government authorities and testified as to its importance during those hearings.



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There are woefully few resources dealing with the enormous problem of outdoor cats in Baltimore City. In 2013, BARCS was the only shelter in the nation to receive the 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.

Once that grant funding concluded it was critical that BARCS seek funding to continue this significant lifesaving program. Thanks to the Maryland Department of Agriculture and the Petco Foundation, BARCS is able to sustain a small staff of 3, plus TNR 3,000 cats annually.

We continue to see measureable success from this program with an amazing 54% decrease in kittens and neonates entering the shelter in calendar year 2016 as compared to 2012 (prior to this program) and a 70% decrease of cat and kitten euthanasia.

Summary of Approach:

The three BCCP employees are an integral part of training and recruiting citizens to help trap outdoor cat populations, providing free spay/neuter surgery and health assessments for each of 3,000 outdoor cats, which in turn helps Baltimore humanely control our community 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 more than 1,100 outdoor cat colonies in Baltimore City, the three BCCP employees also teach community members the proper care techniques and how to help control the population. In the winter months they hold seminars on building outdoor cat housing units.

To reach the goal of 3,000 outdoor cats, the process is ongoing with trapping and Spay/Neuter surgery happening every week when feasible. It is much more than just Spay/Neuter surgery-- each individual 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 next day. Each cat is assessed for the best possible outcome, whether it is returned to its colony, or if it's friendly, brought to 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 and cared for by the three BCCP employees, which also entails daily feeding and cleaning their cages. Additionally, when trapping in any neighborhood, the three BCCP employees need to find time to build trust in each neighborhood, as well as distribute door hangers.

July-September 2016: The previous Assistant to the Best Friends Community Cat Project was promoted to BARCS Community Cat Program Coordinator. We hired and trained 2 assistants, and focused on administrative changes during the transition from the Best Friends to BARCS program, including an essential change to our hotline system.

October-December 2016: Now fully staffed, we focused on canvassing targeted neighborhoods with door hangers to increase awareness. Our newly re-branded van wrap acts as a traveling billboard and helped to spread the word about our new program. Our field team increased our trapping efforts while our Administrative Assistant educated the public, and scheduled trap loans and surgery appointments.

January-March 2017: We had staff changes in January, and focused that month on hiring and training a new Administrative Assistant. Once our new assistant was trained, we redoubled our trapping efforts, beginning to transition our schedules to evening trapping shifts on warmer days. We also identified new needs for volunteers, and recruited volunteers to assist our surgery team on TNR clinic days.

April-June 2017: With warmer weather in full swing, we focused on overnight trapping and meeting the increased public demand for trap loans/drop off appointments. One employee left and we started the recruitment process.



July- November: The grant extension helped us to meet our goal of 3,000 cats, as we continued to focus on overnight trapping and meeting the increased public demand for trap loans/drop off appointments. We still have only two employees and continue to search for a third.

Accomplishments:

Thanks to the Maryland Department of Agriculture's grant funding of 3,000 spay/neuter surgeries for community cats, BARCS was able to sustain our lifesaving TNR program after the conclusion of the three-year Best Friends Animal Society/PetSmart Charities TNR grant that ended in August 2016.

Our accomplishments include:

The coordination of 1,515 spays and 1,485 neuters, for a total of 3,000 altered outdoor cats during the grant period with an extension to December 31, 2017.

In CY 2016, our TNR program has helped to reduce feline euthanasia by 70% and feline kitten intake (under 6 months old) by nearly 54% compared to our pre-TNR baseline year of CY 2012.

Our field work in underserved areas of the city has given us the opportunity to educate residents on proper pet care, the importance of spay/neuter and vaccinations, and to provide information on other free or low-cost programs for their pets. This prevents future litters and reduces shelter intake.

Many complainants have been satisfied with our free, humane deterrents, and education on why TNR is the most effective solution.

We have identified new colonies of cats by increasing our door hanger distribution initiatives. We have been able to canvass areas of interest and have received feedback and requests for help based upon individuals noticing our door hangers.

Best Friends donated the van they purchased for us from their grant that was re-wrapped with the new BARCS Community Cat Program branding. The new eye-catching vehicle wrap has also increased the program's visibility while in the field, which has resulted in individuals approaching us to request more information or to inform us about outdoor cats in their area.

We have stretched our advertising dollars by posting donated bus ads in areas of high need, as well as free advertisements on the Baltimore area Craigslist.org

We have improved our phone call response time from 2-6 weeks to 1-3 days. It is critical to engage the public when they are most available and motivated to learn how to manage their local cat colonies.

Even with only 2 employees until the third position is filled we still average between 150-260 Spay/Neuter surgeries from TNR each month. We can't thank the Maryland Department of Agriculture enough for this lifesaving grant funding.

Lessons Learned:

Weather: Most cats come out during the day in colder weather and in the evenings or overnight in warmer weather. The weather this year has been very inconsistent and has increased the difficulty of pinpointing the times that most cats will be active. We also have learned that our projected numbers should reflect times that we are rained or snowed out on a planned trapping day. Many of our trapping days, Sundays and Tuesdays, have been rained out. This caused us to be short for some of our Monday/Wednesday TNR surgery clinic days. Our surgery team is often able to overbook their schedules on short notice to accommodate us on different days of the week, but due to emergency surgeries and the essential spay/neuter of adoptable shelter animals, the surgery schedule is not always flexible enough to add a large number of cats on days when we do not have large quantity of surgery time reserved in advance.



Previously altered cats: Each month, a number of cats that come through our program are found to be previously altered, but not ear tipped. These cats are still trapped, sedated, vaccinated, and cared for by our staff, but do not count toward our surgery goal.

Dangerous Areas: Many areas with high numbers of unaltered cats are challenging due to drug activity or violent neighborhoods. Sometimes for safety reasons, our staff and volunteers need to leave the field. Their work is based on building trust in these areas, so they cannot seek help from the police or Animal Control without compromising their reputation and safety. This prevents us from finishing colonies in certain areas and also makes it more difficult to recruit and retain new employees and volunteers

Reaching our Goal: Due to the overlap between the conclusion of the Best Friends grant and the start of the Maryland Department of Agriculture grant, the August 2016 spay/neuter surgery numbers had to be included in the final Best Friends statistics. This started us behind for one month of surgeries for the Maryland Department of Agriculture grant, that was already shortened to less than a 12 month grant period.

Our greatest challenge continues to be staffing. At our busiest times of year for trapping, unfortunately, we lost one of our three employees and once she was replaced, we then lost another staff member. The hiring and training process is lengthy and the pay scale is average, making recruitment and retention difficult. As we continue to be more realistic about what one or two employees can accomplish, we have continued to reduce our goal from 3,500 cats per year to 2,500 cats per year. Ideally, having 4 employees at a livable wage would be ideal for increasing our Spay/Neuter goal to back up to more community cats per year.

Attachments:

Excel spreadsheet of 3,000 altered outdoor cats

For More Information Contact:

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