



BARCS Community Cat Program

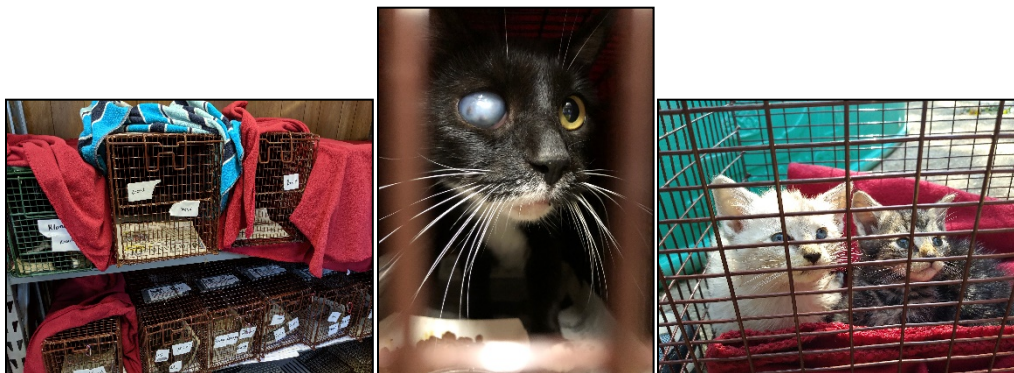
Project #
19-412

County: Baltimore City

Number of Cats Spayed:	1196	Number of Dogs Spayed:	0
Number of Cats Neutered:	1179	Number of Dogs Neutered:	0
Amount Received: \$83700	Amount Remaining (to be returned to MDA): 0		

Project Synopsis:

BARCS will TNR, vaccinate and provide health exams to 2,375 community cats in Baltimore City during this grant cycle. With a grant extension, we reached our goal on October 30, 2019. We can't thank the Maryland Department of Agriculture enough for their continued support of this lifesaving program for Baltimore's community cats.



Project Description:

BARCS was at the forefront of legalizing Trap, Neuter and Return (TNR) in Baltimore City. It was BARCS that initiated conversations about legalizing TNR with government authorities and testified as to its importance during those hearings. 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 and in part thanks to funding from the Maryland Department of Agriculture, continues to alter thousands of Baltimore's community cats annually. It is an ongoing community issue to be able to stem the tide of continued live cat births adding to more unwanted pets in Baltimore City.

There are woefully few resources dealing with the enormous problem of outdoor cats in Baltimore City. BARCS was confident that with grant funding we could begin to tackle this problem at a much higher volume. 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.

With ongoing measureable success in CY 2018, our TNR program has helped to reduce feline euthanasia by 76% and feline kitten intake (under 6 months old) by 60% compared to our pre-TNR baseline year of CY 2012. The program had grown tremendously in other ways such as coordinating trapping loans with community members, providing more education and deterrents, and answering more calls and emails. Our TNR program continues to train and recruit citizens to help trap outdoor cat populations, provide free spay/neuter surgery and health assessments for each of the 2,375 community cats, which in turn helps Baltimore humanely control our



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SPAY AND NEUTER GRANTS PROGRAM



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 more than 1,500 outdoor cat colonies in Baltimore City, the three BARCS Community Cat Program (BCCP) employees teach community members the proper care techniques and how to help control the population. Their field work 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.

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 2,375 outdoor cats, which in turn helps Baltimore humanely control our community cat population so there will be fewer cats over time.

In addition to managing the TNR and tracking of more than 1,500 outdoor cat colonies in Baltimore City, the three BCCP employees also teach community members how to properly care for and reduce the population of their outdoor colonies.

To reach the goal of 2,375 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 about our program.

November - December 2018: After meeting the goal of our previous grant cycle on November 19th, with over a month to spare before the end of our grant's extension to December 31st, we continued our work toward completing our goals for the new grant cycle. We worked on the project of transferring our list of trapping sites to a new and more intuitive spreadsheet.

January - March 2019: We completed the task of transferring our list of trapping sites to the new spreadsheet, which has proven to be invaluable. Trapping sites and contacts are now more easily searched and recorded, allowing us to more efficiently coordinate our weekly trapping sessions. We continued recruiting new volunteers for animal care in our holding area, which helped to free more time to spend doing fieldwork and directly assisting the community.

April - June 2019: Our volunteer recruitment efforts continued to be successful. In addition to animal care volunteers, several volunteers joined us to assist with trapping, allowing an extra staff member to stay in the office and manage administrative duties. We faced the challenge of trapping and spaying/neutering a ringworm positive colony and worked on new protocols to handle any similar future situations.

July - September 2019: Volunteer recruitment continued successfully, adding 2 new members to our team of animal care and trapping volunteers. We faced the challenges of parting ways with one of our veterinary surgeons, reducing the number of spay/neuter surgeries performed each week, as well as panleukopenia outbreaks in outdoor cat populations. BARCS veterinary technicians took over the daily medical care of cats in our holding areas, allowing us more time to face these challenges.



October 2019: The grant extension helped us to meet our goal of 2,375 cats. In addition to BARCS Veterinary Technicians taking on the medical care of community cats in our holding area, the animal care technicians began to assist with morning cleaning three times per week. The hours saved were dedicated to additional fieldwork throughout the week and, despite seeing an unprecedented number of panleukopenia cases in the community, we were able to keep up with our numbers and meet our goal.

Accomplishments:

Thanks to the Maryland Department of Agriculture's grant funding of 2,375 spay/neuter surgeries for community cats, BARCS was able to sustain the 3rd year of 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 1,196 spays and 1,179 neuters, for a total of 2,375 altered outdoor cats during the grant period with an extension to October 30, 2019.

In CY 2018, our TNR program has helped to reduce feline euthanasia by 76% and feline kitten intake (under 6 months old) by 60% compared to our pre-TNR baseline year of CY 2012.

The recruitment of several new volunteers, including hard-to-find trapping volunteers who assist us with fieldwork on a weekly basis.

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 and attending community meetings. Using our colony database, we are able to connect like-minded community members so that they can coordinate their efforts to spay and neuter the cats in their neighborhoods.

Working with our surgery team and Assistant Director of Veterinary Operations to allow more flexibility for additional TNR spay/neuter surgeries without negatively impacting the spay/neuter of adoptable animals, which is essential to reducing their length of stay and opening cages for incoming surrenders.

Lessons Learned:

Our challenges remain largely the same over the years, and include:

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.

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 gang-ruled 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 our first year of receiving the Maryland Department of Agriculture grant, that was already shortened to less than a 12 month grant period. We were able to make our goal, thanks to a generous grant extension, but that unfortunately started us out behind for our 2nd year. We reduced our goal from 3,000 to 2,500 to allow us to catch up, but still started a few months behind. Now, starting our fourth year having caught up with those setbacks, we expect to make our goal as planned.

Public Participation: In 6 years of offering free spay/neuter services for Community Cats, we have made many lasting relationships with caregivers and advocates across the city. The arisen challenge is that a large portion of the most motivated and supportive citizens have already sought out our help. This is a huge accomplishment, but it also means that we have exhausted much of the “low-hanging fruit.” A majority of the many remaining colonies require more detective work. We have to identify and make contact with colony caregivers who are not always willing to cooperate or make themselves known, for a number of varied reasons. Baltimore City struggles with many social issues and our team often finds themselves in a similar position to social workers, offering supplies, resources (for animals and their human caregivers alike), and a listening ear. The additional time taken to gain the trust of residents who are most in need is not easy or always effective but, despite being one of our biggest challenges, it is also the most rewarding.

Attachments:

The photos above (l. to r.) show how cats are housed for any follow up medical care before they can be returned to their colony, an example of some of the medical issues, and two kittens that were just trapped. A spreadsheet of all 2,375 cat is also attached.

For More Information Contact:

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