

COMMUNITY CATS: INDIANA MUNICIPAL GUIDE FOR BUSY LEADERS



WHAT IS A COMMUNITY CAT?

Cats become homeless when they are lost, abandoned or born in the “wild”. A community cat is an unowned stray or feral cat that has been or will go through the **Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR)** process. Volunteers use a live trap and then transport cats to be sterilized, vaccinated and eartipped. The “tip” visually identifies a cat as sterilized.



These cats are cared for by one or more colony caretakers, who provide shelter along with daily food and water. Colony caretakers often cover many expenses out of their own pockets. The result is an engaged volunteer force that humanely cares for outdoor cats while working to reduce their population.

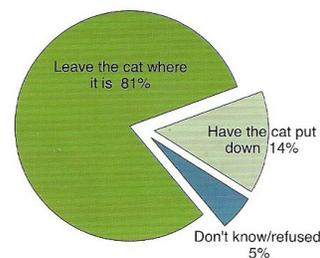
Indiana boasts more than 100 shelters and nonprofit organizations that TNR community cats. These organizations are able to raise funds, apply for grants, and receive free surgery certificates from Spay-Neuter Services of Indiana (SNSI). Their hard work results in stretching shelter dollars while saving lives and serving community members who need assistance with community cats.

When cats are fixed, there are no more kittens, less roaming and less fighting. Unaltered male cats leave a strong odor when marking their territory. After surgery, testosterone levels drop, and the strong odor disappears.

An added benefit is that each cat is given a rabies vaccine at the time of surgery. Kittens and friendly cats are often made available for adoption into homes.

WHY CARE ABOUT CATS?

The [American Veterinary Medical Association](#)ⁱ estimates that 25% of U.S. households have a cat. Hoosiers love cats, with an estimated 38% of us owning a cat. In fact, Indiana ranks number six on the list of the 10 states with the highest percentage of cat owners at year-end 2016.



Additionally, a national survey by [Alley Cat Allies](#)ⁱⁱⁱ revealed that 81% of respondents were in favor of leaving community cats in place.

At the State level, Indiana passed a bill to allow Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR) of feral and free-roaming cats in mobile home parks. [House Bill 1199 \(2014\)](#)ⁱⁱ was authored by Representative Don Lehe with support from several other organizations, including the State Board of Animal Health. When Rep. Lehe canvassed in his district, he noted that pets were present in the homes of the majority of voters he called upon.

These statistics speak volumes about what is important to the constituents you serve. What's more, two new laws were enacted at the Statehouse in 2019 to protect animals.

[Senate Bill 474](#)^{iv}, authored by Senator Alting (R), prevents convicted animal abusers from having an animal during probation or parole.

[House Bill 1615](#)^v, authored by Representative Hatfield (D), defines humane euthanasia and strengthens key terms so prosecutors can effectively charge perpetrators and get convictions. **Both of these bills passed the House and Senate with unanimous support from both sides of the aisle. Hoosiers care about the fate of animals, and that includes our lawmakers.**



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COMMUNITY CATS: BENEFITS TO SHELTERS AND STAFF

Euthanizing healthy animals comes at a high cost, both fiscally and emotionally. Conversely, Community Cat programs prevent cats from ever entering shelters, saving both lives and money – and increasing morale among staff.

JOHNSON COUNTY

Rather than continue to “euthanize”, the Johnson County Animal Shelter changed course, launching their Community Cat program in 2013. **Within four years, feline euthanasia dropped by 83% and saved \$23,000 in costs.** The shelter no longer euthanizes any healthy cats.

As reported by the [Indy Channel](#)^{vi}, the Johnson County animal control director, Michael Delp, and his staff were emotionally exhausted from “euthanizing” healthy cats. Many of these cats were community cats that were not socialized to people or that were incredibly frightened upon entering the shelter.

“There is no nobility in euthanizing—or let’s call it what it really is: killing—healthy cats. It’s never going to reduce the cat population. I know, because I did it for years,” says Delp, “Trap-Neuter-Return is the only solution. It’s the right thing to do.”

A cost that is often overlooked is the emotional toll on staff whose job it is to kill healthy animals. Staff members feel shame, guilt and depression when they have no alternative but to kill healthy, beautiful animals. In these situations, shelter turn-over rate is high, requiring shelter directors to continuously hire and train new employees. This is an additional cost burden to the shelter.

MORGAN COUNTY

Since implanting their Community Cat program in 2013, Morgan County has moved from a 73% feline live release rate to a 93% live release rate.

FULTON COUNTY

The Fulton County Animal Center implemented a Community Cat program in 2015. Within one year, the shelter moved to zero-kill status (a live release rate of 90% or higher.)

JACKSON COUNTY

Four towns in Jackson County are competing to see who can trap-neuter-return the most community cats. The towns of Medora, Clear Springs, Seymour, and Crothersville enlisted the help of their staff members in 2017, and the competition began! The program, dubbed “The Big Fix”, has resulted in more than 866 cats being fixed in just two years. [The Seymour Tribune](#)^{vi} newspaper frequently posts The Big Fix “Score Card” indicating which town is in first place. Spay-Neuter Services of Indiana provided the seed funding to start this project.

These are just a few of the Community Cat programs that are saving lives, saving money, and preventing suffering. You’ll find successful Community Cat programs from Allen County to Vanderburgh County, from Richmond to Terre Haute.

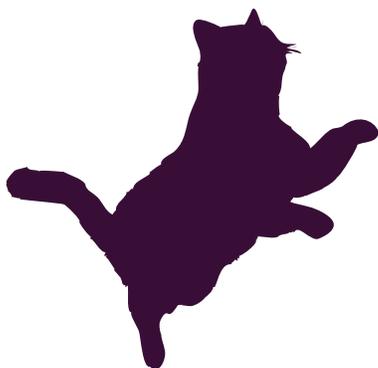


Pictured is Leslie Fittro, representing Medora’s 2018 victory in the friendly competition.

COMMUNITY CATS: THE FACTS

SHELTERS BENEFIT DUE TO COMMUNITY CAT PROGRAMS:

-  Fewer cats killed in the shelter
-  Improved shelter staff morale and decreased turnover rates
-  Money that would have been used to “euthanize” cats is redirected to adoptable animals – dogs have higher adoption rates in shelters that have Community Cat programs
-  Improved reputation within the community
-  Ability to attract funds and grants for trap-neuter-return
-  Widespread public support



Still not convinced that a Community Cat program is right for your area? Consider these facts:

COST CONSIDERATIONS

An article by the [American Veterinary Medical Association](#) ^{viii} estimated that local governments across the U.S. would pay almost **\$16 billion** to trap and kill these cats as opposed to approximately **\$7 billion** for supporting TNR programs run by rescue organizations and volunteers.

Cat advocates will not raise their hands and offer to trap and kill. This makes euthanasia expensive and unsustainable. Enlisting the help of volunteers empowers them to do something to help cats. Their choice is to trap-neuter-return and to achieve success over time OR to do nothing, while the cat populations escalate.

“TNR with the necessary community support is therefore the most cost effective means to feral cat population control,” the study states.

THE VACUUM EFFECT

Cats can be territorial, establishing a colony and chasing away newcomers. But when cats are removed from the colony, new cats freely join. This means that catching and killing feral cats may temporarily reduce the number of cats in a given area, but two things happen: intact survivors continue to breed, and other cats move in to the now-available territory. The vacuum effect is just one reason catch and kill is so ineffective.

WHAT ABOUT THE PEOPLE WHO DON'T WANT CATS ON THEIR PROPERTY?

An organization called Alley Cat Allies offers a publication, [How to Live with Cats in Your Neighborhood](#)^{ix}, which explains how to divert cats. For example, tight-fitting lids on trash cans will impede hungry cats as they search for food. Prevent cats from digging in your garden area by using plastic carpet runners, spike-side up, covered lightly in soil. The publication offers many additional solutions and can be shared online or ordered. A bundle of 20 brochures is just \$5.

THE ONLY SOLUTION

The only solution is to take a strategic approach. Community Cat programs slowly but surely reduce colony sizes. These programs are humane, supported by the community, volunteers, donor dollars, and grant funding. The sooner you get started, the sooner your area will experience success.

WANT TO LEARN MORE?

How to Develop a Community Cat Ordinance:

<https://www.alleycat.org/resources-page/> - Provides information from Alley Cat Allies on starting a Community Cat Ordinance. SNSI can also connect you to local groups/shelters with successful Community Cat programs.

Managing Community Cats, A Guide for Municipal Leaders:

<https://www.animalsheltering.org/page/managing-community-cats-guide-municipal-leaders>

How TNR Works: <http://www.havahart.com/articles/benefits-tnr-programs-euthanasia>

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

This guide was compiled by Spay-Neuter Services of Indiana. SNSI is Indiana's statewide leader, supporting the work of 300 shelters and rescue organizations. Together, we are increasing the effectiveness of our shelters, saving both lives and dollars.

SNSI provides free spay/neuter surgery certificates to rescue groups and shelters, including certificates for Community Cat programs. SNSI also writes grants and undertakes special projects. If there's a project we can help kick-start, we are happy to do so.

SNSI also hosts an annual Indiana Animal Welfare Conference, bringing our state's shelters, rescues and volunteers together for a day of learning and networking so we can stretch our dollars and achieve success sooner.

SNSI is financially supported by donations, grants and the #5 selling Pet Friendly specialty license plate.



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COMMUNITY CATS: ENDNOTES

ⁱ American Veterinary Medical Association: <https://www.avma.org/news/press-release/where-not-so-wild-things-are-avma-releases-data-top-bot-tom-states-dog-cat-and>

ⁱⁱ House Bill 1199: <http://iga.in.gov/legislative/2014/bills/house/1199/#document-a1769a11>

ⁱⁱⁱ A national survey by Alley Cat Allies: https://www.alleycat.org/resources/what-americans-really-think-is-humane-care-for-cats-truth-card/?print_this

^{iv} Senate Bill 474: <http://iga.in.gov/legislative/2019/bills/senate/474/#document-9c69ef50>

^v House Bill 1615: <http://iga.in.gov/legislative/2019/bills/house/1615/#document-bef673b6>

^{vi} As reported by the Indy Channel: <http://www.theindychannel.com/news/local-news/johnson-county-sees-drastic-drop-in-cats-put-down-thanks-to-trap-neuter-release-program>

^{vii} Seymour Tribune: http://www.tribtown.com/2019/03/19/the_big_fix_makes_a_lot_of_progress_in_two_years/

^{viii} An article by the Veterinary Medical Association: <https://www.avma.org/News/JAVMANews/Pages/100601gg.aspx>

^{ix} How to Live with Cats in Your Neighborhood: https://www.alleycat.org/resources/how-to-live-with-cats-in-your-neighborhood/?print_this