

The No Kill Equation - Community Cat TNR Programs (a "keep them out" element)

For those of you who do not know it, there is a robust population of community cats (which are free-roaming cats) in almost every community. Some of these are cats who are not social to people. Some are former house pets who were abandoned or just ended up lost. Some were born outside but still have the capacity to be social to people. They live where they find resources and you may only see them in the evenings of when most people are not around.

Most cats do not belong in municipal animal shelters at all. If you've ever taken your cat to the vet in your car and had him or her turn into something from a horror film, you know lots of cats don't do well with travel and new environments. When cats end up in shelters, it becomes almost impossible to differentiate between a feral cat and a beloved pet who is traumatized. This is a huge problem across the country; most cats who enter shelters are destroyed even though the vast majority are healthy and treatable.

In a community cat TNR Program, free roaming cats do not go to the shelter at all. TNR means trap-neuter-return. Cats are trapped, sterilized, vaccinated and left-ear tipped for easy identification. Those cats social to people are put into foster care or are re-homed. Those cats who are truly feral are returned to their habitat.

Some would say that feral cats should be relocated or destroyed. Cats live in areas where they find resources in the form of food, water and shelter. When you relocate them, more take their place through the vacuum effect. Simply destroying the cats is not only inhumane but often can result in loss of a service they provide in the form of rodent control.

TNR is the only humane method of reducing populations of community cats while keeping cats from entering shelters, thereby saving tax dollars. When TNR programs are in place, municipalities don't need to "do" anything but endorse and advocate the programs while no longer engaging in "catch and kill" of free roaming cats. In some no kill communities, the funds which would otherwise be spent to catch and destroy these cats is applied to having them spayed and neutered so rescue groups can use funds in other ways (like providing medical care to cats who can be re-homed or paying for basic needs while cats are in foster care).