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PETS - Alley Cat Ally - Toronto and the no-kill movement

By Hanna Booth

Lately, the discussion of Toronto becoming a no-kill community is hot one in social media and animal welfare forums.

While there is, inevitably, a small group of naysayers, I think most of the folks engaged in the sheltering community are aware that Toronto is making great strides toward becoming a no-kill community.

I won't get into the debates of how to define no kill versus low kill, rather, I will refer to the general movement toward the community approach to ending shelter euthanasia of adoptable animals.

While Toronto has never declared itself a no-kill city for homeless animals, it is, in fact, well on its way to having the key pieces of the no-kill equation in place.

Many group have prioritized the components of a successful "no-kill" community as follows:

1. Feral cat trap neuter release (TNR) program
2. High-volume, low-cost spay/neuter
3. Working with rescue groups
4. Foster care programs
5. Comprehensive adoption programs
6. Pet retention programs
7. Medical and behavior programs



Shelley is looking to come out of the cold and into your home. If you can adopt this colony cat, email robin@nabet700.com

8. Public relations/community involvement

9. Volunteers

10. Increasing lost animal reclaims

11. A compassionate shelter director

So now let's look at those top ingredients and see how Toronto measures up:

- Feral cat TNR programs – readers of this blog know we've got the trap neuter return (TNR) part of this equation in the bag.

We have the country's most extensive and well-organized TNR coalition working throughout the community to offer a variety of resources including training, free sterilization and vaccination, food banks, trap loan, winter shelters and more.

City bylaws and Toronto Animal Services (TAS) also incorporates TNR into the sheltering policies. When feral cats are brought into the shelter, if they are in good health, they will be sterilized/vaccinated/identified and returned to their habitat versus the alternative of being euthanized on intake as with many municipal practices.

- High-volume, low-cost spay/neuter - Just more than a year ago, the Toronto Humane Society (THS) opened the city's first high-volume, low-cost spay/neuter clinic (http://www.torontohumanesociety.com/sn_clinic.htm) This clinic aims to sterilize more than 6,500 animals a year, especially targeting animals in low-income communities.
- Working with rescue groups - Toronto Animal Services works closely with the local rescue groups and the Toronto Humane Society to place animals that are difficult candidates for general adoption. TAS and THS staffs communicate daily about transfers of animals between their organizations. And TAS veterinarians routinely propose special needs animals to the rescue groups as transfer requests.
- Foster care programs – While each of the rescue groups and shelters have their own fostering networks, we are all constantly recruiting additional foster homes. Through coalition efforts, we are working toward strategies to improve and build fostering networks.

These foster programs have allowed us to save most of the nursing and orphaned kittens that are surrendered to Toronto shelters. These foster homes are lifesavers, caring for the kittens until they are about two months old and are ready for sterilization and adoption.

- Adoption programs - TAS is continually strengthening its adoption program with dozens of adoption partners throughout the city and promotional events through the year. Cat adoptions at retail partners such as Petsmart and Pet Value store have soared in the last few years.

As you can see, Toronto can be proud of its progressive policies and partnerships in animal sheltering. We are well on our way to establishing the necessary programs to work toward becoming a no-kill community.

With a lot left to write about on this subject, I'll have to continue this discussion in next month's column, where I'll take a closer look at the success of a few cities that have transitioned to no-kill communities.

Worthy Weblink of the month

Companion Animal Overpopulation: Trends and Results of Major Efforts to Reach a "No-Kill" Nation (<http://www.firepaw.org/cao.PDF>)

Cool Colony Cat of the month

This plea for a foster or adopter of a colony cat comes from one of the many great cat volunteers I've had the pleasure to get to know in the last few year.

"With winter fast approaching, there is a cat on my mind who I would love to find a special home or foster home for. Shelley is a beautiful tabby with the greenest of eyes. She is a young spayed female at a colony, but is becoming so friendly and is desperate for attention. Can anyone save this cat? I wish I could, but I am over capacity. She will need a patient home but I'm sure she will adjust well to being inside. It's so rewarding, I adopted a cat from my colony, and now she gets to curl up in front of the fire instead of shivering in the cold.."

If you can foster or adopt this girl, email to robin@nabet700.com

Hanna Booth is a shelter veterinarian with a special interest in targeted spay/neuter programs to combate pet overpopulation. Booth and her husband spent a year spaying street animals in Central America; worked as a veterinarian at the Toronto Humane Society; now works for Toronto Animal Services; is a leading member of the Toronto Feral Cat TNR Coalition; and also runs a volunteer program www.torontostreetcats.com. She lives in Roncesvalles with her husband, son, three former street cats and a revolving door of foster cats and kittens.