

New York City Cat Rescue Alliance

The Feral Cat Crisis Has Outgrown Donor-Funded Efforts

Rescuers are overwhelmed, facing a problem greater than our means to solve it.

We are a concerned group of citizens representing local rescue groups and TNR (trap-neuter-return)-certified individuals who are trying to end the reproduction cycle of thousands of free-roaming community, feral, and stray cats in New York City. Volunteers and donor-funded organizations have TNR-ed and found homes for thousands of cats and kittens, removing them from the streets and preventing more kittens being born. But spay/neuter appointments have become more scarce and we're not able to keep up with the overpopulation of cats.

This is a human-caused problem. Cats were introduced to North America by European settlers, and they have reached a critical population that is now the number one cause of death to birds. We recognize that in addition to the obvious suffering we see when cats overpopulate, they have detrimental effects on local wildlife. Through the humane implementation of trap-neuter-return, we could meaningfully reduce and even eliminate the presence of outdoor cats over a 20-year timeframe. This outcome would be within our reach with adequate funding.

The city government has offloaded the problem of feral cats onto private citizens who are now overwhelmed by the scale of the crisis. There are several complicating factors that have hampered efforts to contribute to a solution. The shutdown and reduction in spay/neuter services resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic has been a huge setback in our efforts. One organization said it has seen ten years of progress erased in the last two years. Relying on private citizens and donor-funded nonprofit groups to solve this public problem is not working. It's long past time for city resources to be allocated to the current feral cat crisis. We need holistic, coordinated long-term support from the city, focused on communities where the feral cat population and the burden on rescuers are the greatest.

Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR) is the solution to feral cat overpopulation, endorsed by the American Society for the Protection of Animals and the Humane Society of the United States. This is how TNR works: A feral cat is trapped in a small mammal trap that is large enough for the cat to occupy for several days. The cat is spayed or neutered and ear-tipped, which identifies the cat to other rescuers as a TNR'd cat. After surgery, the cats are held for one to three days during a recovery period and then returned to the area where they were trapped, and where there may be known food sources for cats.

Trap-Neuter-Return began to replace Trap-Euthanize in the 1980's because it wasn't just more human, it was more effective. TNR works better than euthanasia for several reasons:

- Catching and euthanizing cats creates a "vacuum effect." It is impossible to catch all the cats in a given area, and cats from nearby areas quickly move in and reproduce, replacing the removed cats.

- TNR works with cats' territorial nature. Returned, altered cats prevent new cats from moving into their area. Over time, as nearby cats are also TNR'd, the population will gradually age out and die off.
- Identifying unaltered cats in the community is a group effort. Community members who may be caring for cats are not likely to cooperate if euthanasia is the end goal.

The evidence that TNR works in NYC can be seen in every neighborhood that does not have street cats, which includes the lower half of Manhattan. The Urban Cat League has been working in Midtown Manhattan for the last 20 years and now reports that there are only a few dwindling outdoor colonies in existence in the area. Several case studies are listed at the end of this document showing that public funding for TNR works to reduce feral cat populations in cities like Los Angeles, Baltimore and Nashville.

Resources follow the wealth. A donor-funded model of TNR works in wealthy neighborhoods. As neighborhoods gentrify and a critical mass of people with disposable income and leisure time move to an area, then citizen volunteers can make a difference. But this reveals the flaw in the City's policy, or lack thereof. The cat overpopulation is now concentrated in resource-poor neighborhoods. The residents of these neighborhoods also care and want to reduce the cat population, but have conflicting and high-priority needs in their households. The barriers to rescue work can be insurmountable for people who don't have extra money for vet bills, or a car to transport cats, or access to discount spay/neuter appointments.

There is a lot of interest in reducing the feral cat population, but our efforts will be futile if there isn't greater veterinary capacity and support services to enable TNR and rescue efforts.

Factors Contributing to the Feral Cat Crisis:

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a devastating impact on New York City's feral cat population.

Even before the pandemic, local cat rescues and trap-neuter-return (TNR) groups were struggling with the sheer number of cats and kittens on the streets and limited availability of low-cost spay/neuter clinics that cater to rescues and TNR groups. Closures and reduced hours for the few low-cost spay/neuter services have prevented TNR volunteers from being able to manage and care effectively for cat populations in established colonies and on the streets. The result is an exponential increase in street kittens born to cats who were not spayed/neutered or removed from the streets during 2020. The situation is currently a crisis, with groups being forced to turn away requests from homeowners, building superes, and concerned community members when they find new litters or sick/injured cats.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a devastating impact on pet owners and companion pets.

The TNR community has seen a dramatic increase in the number of housecats, or "friendlies" being surrendered to shelters, abandoned in buildings, or dumped on the street or in colonies. While there are no accurate statistics for this, anecdotal evidence suggests that the numbers are much higher than in previous years. We can only extrapolate that as people lost work and income, or even their homes or lives as a result of the virus, individuals or family members were no longer able to care for their pets and companion animals, and, faced with little information,

fear of stigmatization, or no access to services, they made the heartbreaking decision to give up their cats. This has increased the pressure on shelters and rescue groups, who were already stretched to capacity, as well as TNR groups, who are now also identifying and trying to care for “friendlies.”

The feral cat crisis is exacerbated by income inequality. The feral cat population is highest in NYC’s poorest neighborhoods. Resources follow wealth. Before the pandemic, some progress was being made in neighborhoods that were gentrifying even while the problem grew worse in lower-income areas. COVID-19 was a huge setback, but it also removed the illusion of progress. The piecemeal approach that privately funded spay/neuter clinics offered was not serving neighborhoods with the greatest need.

NYC is neglecting its municipal responsibilities through inaction. NYC has sanitation services, graffiti removal, and street tree maintenance, but has not addressed the overpopulation of feral cats. Feral cats are a sign of neglected neighborhoods, similar to litter and graffiti. As the problem is addressed and the cat population is managed, reduced, or eliminated, property values will increase.

Immediate Solutions:

Our primary need is for more spay/neuter appointments, but there is an ecosystem of services that enables effective TNR projects.

- 1. We need greatly expanded and more widely available discount spay/neuter veterinary services.** With spay/neuter appointments on the private market starting at \$500, being a responsible pet owner has become out of reach for the average New Yorker. We need discounted spay/neuter—not just for rescuers, but also for lower-income NYC residents and those in public housing. The largest provider of discounted spay/neuter appointments is the ASPCA, which releases ## number of spots each month that are claimed within 60 seconds of being posted. The waiting list for a NYCHA resident to spay/neuter their cat with The Toby Project (a privately funded mobile clinic with discounted or free spay/neuter for qualified residents) has over 1,000 names. Current spay/neuter services do not even come close to meeting the needs of NYC, resulting in greater overpopulation of stray cats, many of whom were abandoned for nuisance behaviors that spay/neuter would solve.
- 2. Create community holding spaces where cats can be cared for before and after surgery.** TNR projects are planned around spay/neuter appointment dates. Trapping can be unpredictable, so rescuers may start trapping three or more days before the spay/neuter date. The cats need a place to be housed where they can be fed twice a day and the rescuers’ traps are cleaned. After surgery, the cats need between one and three days to recover before being released. The holding space could be a garage, basement, unused business, or vacant commercial storefront. Ideally, the holding space and spay/neuter clinic would be adjacent to each other to reduce the need for transportation.

- 3. Provide transportation to move cats between the holding spaces and spay/neuter clinics.** The Mayor’s Alliance used to offer van service for TNR projects. For rescuers planning the logistics of their trapping project, it was extremely helpful to have access to transport that could hold more than 20 traps. Without access to large-capacity transportation, TNR projects are severely limited in scope, if not impossible.

How Can These Services Be Funded?

We believe that the largest city in the wealthiest country in the world should be able to find funding in its budget to provide a bare minimum of services to address a public problem toward which many citizen volunteers are already donating their time, energy, and money. Because reducing street cat populations improves property values, it would make sense to allocate funds from property taxes. The city is already enriching its tax base by exploiting the efforts of volunteers—mostly women, many of whom are immigrant residents of low-income neighborhoods—involved in TNR. It’s time to allocate resources to those volunteers, who have already contributed so much.

How Should These Services Be Implemented?

Our recommendation is to form a public/private partnership between the Animal Care Centers and privately funded organizations that have a proven track record. Some of the organizations that we endorse are:

American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals—The ASPCA is currently the largest provider of discounted spay/neuter appointments in NYC and has locations in several boroughs. Despite an increase in their recent fund-raising as shown in its tax filings for 2019 and 2020, it has drastically cut services. Because of these service cuts, it is not certifying any new rescuers for TNR, which means that new rescuers cannot request discount spay/neuter appointments from the largest provider.

Neighborhood Cats—One of the city’s oldest TNR non-profits, Neighborhood Cats is a city-wide facilitator for TNR projects. It provides training and logistics support to empower trappers and could advise on the communities where there is the greatest need.

Brooklyn Cat Cafe—From its origins as an adoption center for rescued cats, Brooklyn Cat Cafe has greatly expanded their rescuer services to include discounted spay/neuter and vet care.

Flatbush Cats—A neighborhood-based organization, Flatbush Cats has become extremely effective in its service area, mobilizing a base of volunteers to staff a holding space and using its social media channels to educate the public on the benefits and challenges of TNR efforts. It has raised funds to open its own spay/neuter clinic in spring 2023. This full-service neighborhood-based model is something that could be duplicated effectively in communities with the greatest need.

The Toby Project—Mobile clinic that serves lower-income residents and rescuers currently operates one van that can spay/neuter 19 cats a day. Expanding its mobile clinic fleet and focusing on lower-income neighborhoods would take a great burden off of rescuers and reduce the number of abandoned cats.

Other Considerations

The veterinarian shortage has ripple effects on TNR: We need to recruit and pay a competitive wage to veterinarians to focus on the feral cat crisis. The veterinary shortage is impacting every organization that offers rescuer discounts for spay/neuter. To offer rescuer rates, vet salaries must be subsidized so they can dedicate their efforts to TNR.

Intervene in the cycle of abandonment: A common pattern rescuers see is abandoned juvenile friendly cats on the street. Someone in the community finds a kitten and decides to keep it as a pet with good intentions. But if the cat enters puberty and isn't spayed or neutered, female cats can go into heat and yowl for days on end, and males may begin spraying a foul-smelling liquid to mark their territory. If the household is unaware of or can't afford spay/neuter, then the cat will likely be turned out on the street, where it joins the general population of stray cats and enters the reproductive cycle, contributing to the problem.

Offering free or low-cost spay-neuter appointments to the general population would relieve the burden on rescuers by reducing abandonment. When spay/neuter is unaffordable and only rescuers can get access to precious, rare, discounted appointments, then the burden of spaying and neutering every single cat in NYC falls on their shoulders. This is not fair, nor is it a practical solution to the problem.

Converting feeders to trappers: Cat rescuers often start out as neighborhood feeders. They see starving cats in their community and want to help. When they see that over-reproduction will be a long-term problem, they often look for resources and learn about TNR. As trappers, they can be extremely effective because they know the neighborhood well and are familiar with the cats. Many feeders are elderly or may not be physically able to become trappers, but trappers who know other feeders can help bridge that gap.

Without resources such as access to low-cost spay/neuter, holding space and transport, the neighborhood feeder can't make the transition from feeder to trapper. If the city focused its resources on neighborhoods with the greatest feral cat populations, local residents who have been contributing to the problem could start solving the problem.

Cat hoarding: Cat hoarding can be a big contributor to a growing feral cat population and is a tragic combination of mental illness and animal abuse. Coordinated city services that address mental health and animal protection are needed to assist cat rescuers in removing cats from these situations, providing them with veterinary care and spay/neuter services, and rehoming them in safe environments. When an EMT, medical provider, police, social worker or home health aide encounters a person living in an animal hoarding situation, they should immediately be able to report to a city agency that can remove the animals to a safe environment.

When a hoarder dies or is hospitalized, all too often health care workers or neighbors may open a door or window to prevent the animals from starving inside. The opportunity to contain and solve the problem is missed and instead the cats become a neighborhood problem to solve over the next months and years.

Bodega Cats: Bodega cats are often not adequately cared for by shopkeepers. Some store owners are under the misapprehension that a spayed/neutered cat will not be motivated to catch mice.

Cat rescue efforts need more community partners in city agencies. To address a variety of situations like abandoned, injured, or abused cats, we need partners in agencies like the Department of Sanitation, the MTA, the NYPD, Health Department and Animal Care Centers. Coordination among agencies and guidelines for agency employees for when they find an animal can help identify resources to remove abandoned animals from the street and to get rescue organizations involved with feral cat populations.

If spay/neuter services can be provided at low-cost to the community, a public relations campaign will be needed to spread the word and educate the public: It should not fall on rescuers to have every cat in NYC spayed or neutered. We need to empower the general public to become responsible pet owners and spay or neuter their animals. If affordable spay/neuter services can be expanded into the neighborhoods with the greatest need, an education campaign will only make that access more effective.

Support local, multilingual community education efforts: The city should provide or support outreach and education efforts targeting local community members in various languages with information about local resources available for pets and animals; the importance of spay/neuter, testing, and vaccination (FIV/FELV); TNR training; and community sensitization to feral/street cats and kittens. This would support the work that local organizations are already doing and enable them to scale up their efforts and provide a larger cross-section of diverse community members with vital information.

Legal Considerations for TNR in NYC:

During Cuomo's administration, New York State [Agricultural Law section 350](#) became an obstacle to funding requests to address the overpopulation of feral cats. According to opponents of TNR, it defines cats as 'companion animals' which makes the 'Release' part of TNR problematic. Returning a companion animal to the street, even though the cat was living there before trapping, is classified as abandonment, according to their interpretation.

In 2015 Andrew Cuomo [vetoed a bill](#) to provide funding for spay/neuter of unowned cats that had widespread support. Conservation groups and PETA pressured Cuomo to veto the bill because they would not support any solution that allowed cats to continue being cared for outdoors.

But it turns out that Agricultural Law section 350 actually does not address feral cats and is written specifically to protect pets from abuse and abandonment. It is simply a definition:

“Companion animal” or “pet” means any dog or cat, and shall also mean any other domesticated animal normally maintained in or near the household of the owner or person who cares for such other domesticated animal. “Pet” or “companion animal” shall not include a “farm animal” as defined in this section.

We do not see that Agricultural Law section 350 has any role to play in the current dialogue on how to address the feral cat crisis. The past focus on it was an overreach.

It’s been almost eight years since this funding bill was defeated and with the feral cat population exploding, it’s not the victory for birds that conservationists had hoped. Many rescuers are also bird lovers. Some of us are birders who began TNR work as a way to reduce the feral cat population to make the environment safer for birds. We see our efforts to reduce or eliminate outdoor cats in line with a future where native bird species can flourish.

Case Studies from Other Cities/Municipalities:

Los Angeles, CA: LA Animal Services – Voucher Program for Pets and Citywide Cat Program

The City of Los Angeles, Department of Animal Services manages [two spay & neuter programs](#) to assist Los Angeles residents with sterilization costs for their companion dogs, cats, and rabbits.

The Discount Spay & Neuter Coupon Program is available to all residents while the Free Spay & Neuter Certificate Program is available to qualifying City of Los Angeles residents whose annual combined household income is below HUD's Household Low Income limits. This program is for owned pets, not for feral or community cats or TNR programs.

In November, 2022 the [Citywide Cat Program](#) launched. It makes funds available for the spay/neuter of free-roaming cats that may be returned to where they were found, relocated to a working cat program, or adopted. The purpose of the program is to assist in achieving the City’s no kill goal and support the City’s adoption of TNR as the preferred method of addressing the free-roaming cat population in the City. The objectives include:

- Facilitate spaying and neutering of cats
- Reduce the relative number of free-roaming cats over time
- Facilitate more public and community education on animal-related topics, including free-roaming cats
- Train animal services staff members on cat management programs and engage in collaborative efforts with local rescue groups to help respond to and address free-roaming cat issues
- Further implement the City’s no-kill policy by reducing the rate of euthanasia of cats in City animal services centers
- Establish TNR as the preferred policy to humanely address free-roaming cats.

The Citywide Cat Program launched after a 10-year hiatus of a previous TNR spay/neuter voucher program. In 2012, the City was sued by a conservation group because it had not implemented a required Environmental Impact Review (EIR). The program for feral cats was stopped, but the companion animal voucher program continued. An EIR was conducted by the LA Department of Engineering and completed in 2019. The findings of the [EIR](#) were supportive of a broad expansion of TNR support as proposed in the Citywide Cat Program.

It's worth noting that in the 10-year period that the TNR voucher program was suspended, the [feral cat population in LA County exploded](#), further evidence that donor-funded solutions alone are not enough to solve the feral cat crisis.

Nashville, TN: Public-private partnership and support for low-income community members.

Nashville's [Pet Community Center](#) partners with [Metro Animal Care and Control](#) to offer low cost spay/neuter services for community and feral cats, in support of TNR efforts. The program also offers: free trap/cage loan; free winter shelters, food, and other supplies; mentoring, resources, information, and outreach materials; low-cost vaccinations, spay/ neuter, and medical services. **Through their Pets for Life program, they support low-income community members to keep their companion animals.** "Pets for Life transforms the lives of animals by serving people and pets in underserved areas and bringing awareness to systemic inequities and injustices. Through Pets for Life, we serve those isolated from pet service providers by utilizing long-term, door-to-door outreach to build trust, connect with people and their pets, and increase access to resources and information. The program provides free spay/neuter services, wellness care, pet supplies, transportation support, and resources to pet owners who statistically have the least access to affordable veterinary care and supplies. Since 2017, Pet Community Center has provided medical care and resources to 1,564 pet owners with the greatest need." Read more in their [2020 Annual Report](#).

Baltimore, Maryland: Public-private partnership

A case study of Baltimore was provided in the appendices of the LA Citywide Cat Program EIR. Excerpts from a 2017 memo are provided below:

For many years the Office of Animal Control trapped and euthanized thousands of cats in an attempt to control the steadily increasing population. This policy did not demonstrate success in reducing the number of stray and abandoned cats in the community. Concurrently, feeding bans - which were ineffective and difficult to enforce - were put in place. In addition to being ineffective, these bans were extremely inhumane, as they forced cats that were already dependent on a source to find a new, likely insufficient resource of food.

Ten years ago, the Baltimore City Health Department, with the assistance of local residents and animal advocates, researched best practices to adopt a more humane and effective method in handling the City's stray cat population. As a result of this process, the City's Health Code was amended to allow for a TNR program. This program has been extremely effective in reducing

the stray cat population by ending the cycle of breeding, which has reduced the number of free-roaming cats. This program has been successfully utilized in other cities throughout the US and has significantly progressed in Baltimore City over the years as resources have been made available to fully implement the program.

Since the program's inception, Baltimore Animal Rescue and Care Shelter (BARCS) has seen a 9.6% decrease in intake of adult cats and an impressive 54% decrease in intake of kittens under the age of six months. This decline in unowned cats being housed in our shelter has positively decreased feline euthanasia by 73%. BARCS' live release rate for shelter cats went from 60% to over 90%. In addition, thousands of Baltimore City residents were provided with free assistance, over 1,500 colonies of altered cats (ranging from 1 to 100 cats in each colony) have been through the program and are now managed by their Baltimore City resident caregivers, thousands of cats and kittens received additional medical care, and hundreds more were placed in alternative positive outcomes such as adoption or foster care.

Colorado State University Veterinary Teaching Hospital, Fort Collins, CO

Example of an educational institution partnering with nonprofit and private sector entities to provide care for shelter animals. "Colorado State University provides funds to spay or neuter 750 shelter dogs and cats each year. Nestle Purina PetCare and the Center for Companion Animal Studies partnered to fund a remodeling of the Larimer Humane Society surgery suite to allow us to bring a team of surgeons and students to the shelter on Mondays to spay and neuter these animals. Jorgenson Laboratories donated two anesthesia machines to our center to help support this program." [Read more.](#)

Buncombe County, NC: [ASPCA](#)

The ASPCA of Buncombe County, NC offers free spay/neuter for community cats.

FOR FURTHER READING: The scope of the problem:

Below are some links with data about the efficacy of TNR programs, and why the City should do more to support the efforts of local individuals and groups to do TNR by ensuring more availability of low-cost veterinary care for these cats.

<https://www.alleycat.org/resources/trap-neuter-return-research-compendium/>
[https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fvets.2019.00238/full?utm_source=Email to auth
ors &utm_medium=Email&utm_content=T1_11.5e1_author&utm_campaign=Email publicati
on&field=&journalName=Frontiers_in_Veterinary_Science&id=433654](https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fvets.2019.00238/full?utm_source=Email_to_authors&utm_medium=Email&utm_content=T1_11.5e1_author&utm_campaign=Email_publication&field=&journalName=Frontiers_in_Veterinary_Science&id=433654) and summarized here:
<https://news.ufl.edu/2019/08/does-sterilizing-stray-cats-work/>

Prior to COVID, the ASPCA said they spayed 35,000 cats in NYC in 2019 according to [this article in the Gothamist](#). When they and other vets/clinics closed during the pandemic (incidentally right at the beginning and through an entire kitten season) spay/neutering was put on hold

completely. In 2021, ASPCA reported that they spayed 26,000 cats in NYC according to their [annual report](#). That's a service reduction of 40% as community needs increased.

Simultaneously, [large animal welfare organizations took in 21.45% fewer cats](#) during the first year of the pandemic because of limited capacity and ability to facilitate adoptions with ease during major COVID restrictions.

At the same time, vets that provide low-cost services to TNR and rescue individuals and groups were stressed, overloaded and unwilling to take on our low-cost cases when they had to limit the number of clients they saw because of COVID restrictions. They just couldn't afford to see us anymore when they were seeing fewer clients and had so much demand for full-price services. We lost the Toby Project stationary clinic in Bath Beach. There are a handful of local vets that work with us, and they have been forced to limit who they work with and what they will do because they are overwhelmed.

The immediate fallout during the early stages of the pandemic:

<https://www.thecity.nyc/2020/11/24/21717488/spay-and-neuter-pandemic-cat-astrophe>

<https://www.bideawee.org/news/new-york-post-woman-spends-600-a-month-caring-for-feral-cats-in-nyc-amid-coronavirus/>

<https://www.wnyc.org/story/how-coronavirus-affecting-stray-cats/>

<https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2020/apr/15/stray-cats-rescue-coronavirus-new-york>

Recent Impact:

ASPCA – is no longer allowing newly certified rescuers to use their services

Private Vets are limiting capacity – Some won't treat dumped animals that are friendly for a discount anymore, and some won't work with newly certified people anymore. Some only will work with people that they have worked with in the past. Even the few of us that have access to these services can't afford to pay \$500+ per animal for basic neutering.

Now many of [those animals are being returned and dumped](#).

Rescue community efforts:

Below are testimonials from local community members who are involved with our group to demonstrate the scope of the problem.

Rose Martin - Sunset Park, Brooklyn:

TNR certified Nov. 2020. Over 230 cats spay/neutered at my own expense since then. My neighborhood feral cat situation is that if I had the opportunity, I could find a cat to fix every

single day without a break, for a year, within walking distance of my home, and have many to spare.

Government works best when it helps those who are already helping:

Are environmentalists expected to clean up the Gowanus with their bare hands because they love the earth so much? Cat rescuers currently buy their own equipment, PPE, transportation, food, all supplies and vet services even though the result of our labor benefits first and foremost home owners by protecting their property value. This is a community problem and needs community solutions, and the results benefit entire communities. Many residents love and care for these animals, at their own cost, and would do what is right for them (vaccines against rabies, distemper, spay/neuter at a minimum) if the services were made available to them. Feral cats lower property value. For that reason alone, government resources must be opened up to those currently doing the work to keep the populations down. Rescuers are proven to be able to do this labor. Help those who help themselves.

Trap Neuter Return works for feral cat colonies:

I'll share a couple of examples of cat colonies I'm familiar with to illustrate how TNR works.

Colony A: for 18 years, my neighbor, a low-income, disabled animal lover has been feeding and caring for a colony in Sunset Park, Brooklyn. She has arranged all cats to be TNRed (Trap Neuter Return), and monitors their health and well-being. Occasional newcomers are also TNRed. No kittens have been born in this territory for over 9 years, since TNR was initiated. No diseased cats die in the yard, no kittens are eaten by racoons. The number of cats in this colony is stable. 11 cats in 2015, 11 cats in 2023. One has passed away of old age. Several have been adopted out. Newcomers come to replace the ones who have gone, the ecosystem can support 11 cats, so 11 cats there are, and all healthy and happy.

Colony B: I received a call about an animal hoarder who was evicted a few blocks away. No TNR had ever taken place. A nice brownstone, normal sized yard. 30 cats had been let out to fend for themselves. A dead body buzzed with flies. The back area by the fence reeked with diseased diarrhea smell. A blind cat sat stock-still, unable to navigate the confusing new environment. 3 kittens screamed at the prospect of food, rushing towards us as a neighbor opened a hole in the fence to let us in. This block was NOT equipped to feed 30 cats, there was NO tradition of neighbors feeding cats, this ecosystem could NOT support 30 cats, and certainly not 30 cats still breeding and producing more cats every month.

The Brooklyn Cat Cafe and 3 independent rescuers took in the blind one, kittens, and 6 sick adults the first 2 days. I convinced a neighbor to begin feeding the starving cats, at my own expense, I still supply this feeder with food, out of my own pocket. ACC did not, at the time, and to my understanding still, remove cats from outdoor situations as they are considered feral. Most were not feral, they had been indoor pets, unceremoniously turned out to the streets. Pooping in yards, yowling at night, bleeding and giving birth on properties that did not feed or support them, lowering property value and upsetting good-hearted residents who do not want

to see animals going blind from eye infections but unable to help in any way. After weeks of (self-funded) spay/neuter efforts, 30 cats were down to 12. A year later, between cats moving of their own accord or vanishing, only 3 cats remain. The ecosystem can sustain 3 cats, and in a year, no new kittens were born into this environment, and 3 cats remain.

Trap Neuter Return works. If NYC animal lovers are given the tools and resources to keep their own blocks clean, they will do so.

Pet owners want to do the right thing, government should help those who want to do right:

During the unprecedented global pandemic, low-cost veterinary resources once available to NYC residents vanished. Conscientious pet owners who relied on ASPCA mobile vans, vouchers for spay/neuter, or other options, have had, still have, nothing to turn to to get their animals fixed and vaccinated. NYC pet owners need to be able to care for their pets affordably. \$800 for a spay is not realistic for most Sunset Park residents, but that is what it costs IF they can find availability AND can arrange transportation to veterinary offices very far away from them.

The reason you do not see litter after litter born, and torn in half by raccoons, in yards in Park Slope is that ENOUGH residents CAN afford a \$800 spay and \$50 Uber ride each way that they take proper care of their pets and do not get overwhelmed, confused, and desperate and turn to dumping beloved pets outside when they turn up pregnant or begin exhibiting nuisance behaviors like spraying an aggression that are solved by spay/neuter. Pet owners need affordable, local, multi-lingual, easy to access spay/neuter services for their owned pets. They want to do the right thing. We know this, because they used to take advantage of these programs when they were offered. When they were stopped with no reports on re-starting, the ones who suffer are the animals, but also the owners who relied on these services. There is no reason anymore to keep these services suspended. They should have come back before Broadway reopened, but regardless, it is now far past time to get back up and running. You want NYC to be a cosmopolitan, attractive, diverse and exciting city, that includes affordable opportunities for spay/neuter for owned pets.

You are a good person who does not want to see animals suffer and no one will help you.

If you went into your own backyard and found a mother cat and 6 kittens, would you know who to call or what to do? The vast majority of residents of this city would have zero idea what agency to call, and the sad truth is, NO city or state agency is currently equipped to do the best thing for this family, which is bring in the nursing mother and kittens until they are 12 weeks old. ASPCA may take orphaned kittens, ACC would direct you to feed the mother and monitor until the kittens are older, leaving them at risk of predation, the elements, and illness or accidents.

Only private rescuers are currently offering (at their own expense) to capture, house, offer vet services, transportation, spay/neuter, vaccinate against rabies and other diseases that affect owned pets and humans, and arrange eventual adoption of kittens (and return of mother, who will then be fed by whom, you? for 20 years?) . Even if you had resources you would like to

direct to this situation, there is currently NO way for you to access ASPCA services. You must find, by internet searching yourself, a private rescuer who lives near you and pray they are not already over capacity, and beg them for their help. They are not obligated to help you by anything other than their own morality, and are exhausted by having to turn away requests like yours every single day.

If you saw a dog running loose in a park, you would have some idea where to start looking for help. Police, ACC, maybe a dog rescue organization, would at least be able to direct you on next steps. No such resources exist for cats ("Officer? There is a cat here who is hungry!" Imagine how that call to the police station would go). If you live in anything other than the most expensive areas of the 5 boroughs, I guarantee you walk past cats every single day who are in desperate need, and I don't blame you for not helping them, most people would not know where to start, and the truth is there IS no where to start. EVEN if you wanted to become the person who takes care of this, there is no mechanism in this city today for you to become a cat rescuer with access to ASPCA resources. You could pay retail rates (up to \$800 per cat), or nothing. Those are the options today.

If you went into your backyard today and found a mother cat and 6 kittens, what would you do?

Clelia Ramos - Jamaica, Queens:

I came to NYC from El Salvador in 1984 when I was 11. My family left because life there had become dangerous and we feared for our safety. I have lived in Jamaica, Queens ever since I arrived in the US. I live in a one-bedroom apartment with my daughter in nursing school and my mother who has dementia and my aunt who suffered from a stroke and is disabled. I'm a caseworker at Catholic Charities Senior Center in Jamaica, Queens.

I got involved in cat rescue when I started walking Bruno, my daughter's dog. I noticed a lot of cats in the street, looking for food, very skinny. Next time I walked the dog, I brought some dry food to feed the cats. After a week I made it a daily routine and brought more food, including wet food. The cats started to expect food from me.

After I had been feeding them a while, I noticed they were multiplying, so I could see there was a problem. I looked around to see what I should do, and I contacted Neighborhood Cats and learned about TNR. I went from being a feeder to become a trapper around six years ago.

As I was doing TNR I started to notice sick cats, cats that weren't eating due to dental disease or other problems. I had to get help for them and Neighborhood Cats helped me. In every rescue project and trapping project I could get some discounted services but I had to spend my own money. Little Wanderers helped with veterinary care too. The average amount I spend on these extra-care cases is between \$100 - \$120. And that's on top of other weekly costs like food and medicine. I feed 33 cats every day and they are all spayed and neutered, but new cats come all

the time so I always have about 5 cats on the horizon that need to be spayed or neutered. Often they are friendly cats that may be abandoned or released from a home in the neighborhood.

An elderly woman in the neighborhood, Anna, passed away and she was feeding 11 cats, so now I'm taking care of those cats too. I worry about the other feeders in the neighborhood. If something happens to them, then I have more cats to feed.

I need more spay/neuter appointments - that's number one. I can go after work and trap by myself, but if I don't have appointments, then there's no point. Veterinary clinics that can work with rescuers at discounted rates, would also help. I come across so many sick and injured cats. I wish I could get more help in trapping and recovery, finding space for cats to be cared for before and after surgery. I can take the cats to a place that charges \$5 a day for holding, but it starts to add up.

There are problems with cat hoarders who don't want to cooperate and get their cats spayed and neutered. There are 6 cats I'm trying to help from a hoarding situation. It can be overwhelming because I have so many cat supplies and food to buy and I need to take care of my family too. I only make \$19 an hour.

But no matter what, I can sleep at night knowing that the cats will not be hungry.

Momoko Kawakami - Forest Hills, Queens:

I came to New York City in 2003 from Japan to go to school. I live in Forest Hills, Queens in a one-bedroom. I used to live in Jamaica where I met Clelia feeding cats in front of my apartment in March 2020, as the pandemic was beginning. I donated some food and money to her and then I started helping her feed some cats on my block. A couple of blocks away she was having problems feeding cats because of hostile neighbors and I was able to move some of them to my block. I started feeding them at midnight or 2am to avoid the neighbors who didn't like the cats and I kept moving the food closer to my block. It took a month to move them! It was a group of 7-10 cats. Clelia fixed all of them and several of them have become tame and I have taken them off the street to foster and find homes for them.

People in Jamaica don't understand why Clelia is feeding the cats and they don't like it. I try to help them understand so they won't be mad at Clelia. Some people started cooperating and one even let me trap in her backyard. But many of them hate cats and don't support Clelia feeding them. We have so many problems with people dumping cats too, hoarding cats, mentally ill people.

We need spay/neuter appointments that are nearby, we need holding space for large projects. I can hold one cat in my bathtub, but when you have many cats to spay/neuter, then you can't do a large project that way. People in Jamaica are very poor. Many people live in one apartment. They don't have space to hold cats before and after surgery.

I spent more than \$30,000 over the last two years on cat rescue work. Some cats are sick or injured and need extra vet care. The costs add up when you foster and feed many cats too. I am a part-time massage therapist with no health insurance.

Cultural differences contribute to problems with cat rescue in Jamaica. People who don't have pet cats in their culture and they think a cat is no different from a rat or other pest. And even if they want to keep a pet cat, they can't afford vet care. I know people who adopted a kitten who later died because they didn't know they need to take the cat to a vet. We have problems with bodega cats who are not spayed or neutered as well.

Molly Caldwell - East New York, Brooklyn:

I've been doing rescue/TNR independently since 2014. First in Crown Heights, and now East NY where I live. You can't walk anywhere without seeing cats. Whether dumped, stray, or feral, they are everywhere. I am block-focused now as I don't have resources out here to manage more and I have to drive to Flatbush or Brooklyn Heights for spay/neuter/adoption services. The ASPCA two blocks from me is understaffed and I can't get appointments. They took away the mobile vans which were convenient and allowed me to do more.

I TNR every cat that shows up. If they are friendly I get them homes, if they are injured, I get them care all at my own expense or with a system of mutual aid from other rescuers. I feed a small colony in my front and back yards as well. Occasionally I'll help people from the Nextdoor neighborhood app or if a neighbor approaches me, but the need is so vast, my time limited, and resources so few, I had to make the decision to just manage my own block - and still, they keep coming.

Jackie Borodan - Sunset Park, Brooklyn: Doing TNR for about 8 years. I have a colony of 9 cats. I have spayed/neutered 100s of cats throughout the years. I am fortunate to have recovery space for up to 12 cats. I help recover cats for other rescuers who do not have recovery space. Found homes for many, many friendly cats that have been trapped or dumped cats that have been found.

ASPCA: Since 9/13/21 ASPCA stopped accepting new rescuers to qualify for discounted spay/neuter appointments. This undermines our efforts to get more people to become TNR certified so they can contribute to the control of the feral cat and kitten population:

Hello TNR people and rescuers,

We wanted to let you know about some significant operational changes that the ASPCA announced on 9/13/2021.

- No new ASPCA accounts are being accepted at this time.
- Free spay/neuter from the ASPCA is available only to NYC residents who had a rescuer account on the ASPCA platform as of 9/13/2021

For people with an ASPCA account, if you haven't already done so, please [log on](#) and sign the new 2021-2022 rescuer agreement so you will be able to book appointments in the future,

Please click on: [the email from the ASPCA](#) outlining their changes and the latest [Neighborhood Cats' Resource Guide](#) with low-cost spay-neuter options, trap bank info, and other information.

Due to the nationwide shortage of veterinarians, discount spay/neuter appointments are in limited supply. Neighborhood Cats will assist those who have attended the workshop in finding appointments to the best of our ability.

Please contact us with questions.