



## **Making the Case for a Paradigm Shift in Community Cat Management, Part Two Webcast Transcript**

July 2013

*Christie Keith:*

Hi. Good evening everyone. I'm Christie Keith, a communications consultant for Maddie's Institute<sup>SM</sup>. Welcome to the second in our two-part series on radically rethinking the relationship between cats and animal shelters. Tonight's panel discussion is a Q&A session to address your questions and concerns about the information presented in part one of the series.

In that webcast, Dr. Kate Hurley, Director of the UC Davis Koret Shelter Medicine Program, presented new solutions to the suffering, stress, illness and death that are the fate of so many cats in our nation's animal shelters, including an array of positive alternative approaches, such as shelter-neuter-return or not taking community cats in at all, if we can offer a lifesaving outcome.

Tonight, you will be hearing from a panel of sheltering experts responding to questions you submitted during the first webcast, via e-mail and also questions you submit live this evening. I'll explain how you can submit questions in a few minutes. Joining us tonight is Dr. Kate Hurley, Director of the UC Davis Koret Shelter Medicine Program, once again; Dr. Julie Levy, Director of Maddie's<sup>®</sup> Shelter Medicine Program at the

University of Florida; Rich Avanzino, President of Maddie's Fund<sup>®</sup> and former Director of the San Francisco SPCA; Jon Cicirelli, Deputy Director of San Jose Animal Care and Services, and Board Member of the California Animal Control Director's Association; and Holly Sizemore, Director of Community Programs and Services at Best Friends Animal Society.

We will be starting in just a few moments, but before we do, we have some housekeeping items we need to cover. I will be moderating the panel, and I will be asking the panelists to respond to questions that we have already received from you, as well as those that come in this evening. On the left hand of your screen, you will see a Q&A window. That is where you can submit your questions during the webcast. It would be helpful to us if you have a question for someone specific that you address the question to them. That will help us process it more easily.

If you need any help with your connection during the presentation, you can click the "help" icon at the bottom of your screen or go to "[event.on24.com/view/help](https://event.on24.com/view/help)." You will also see there are some other little images at the bottom of your screen along with the help button. These are called widgets. The green file widget will take you to the resources our presenters wanted to share with you tonight, as well as some from us at Maddie's Institute. The presenter's resources can also be found on our

website at [www.maddiesinstitute.org](http://www.maddiesinstitute.org). Please note that while the links in the presentation slides are not clickable, those same links are included in the resource documents, and you will be able to click them there.

If you are Tweeting or Facebooking this webcast, our hash tag is “#change4cats,” that is the pound sign, the number 4 and cats. Before we begin tonight’s Q&A, I want to say a few words about Maddie’s Fund<sup>®</sup>, which is the leading funder of shelter medicine education in the United States. It is Maddie’s Fund’s goal to help save the lives of all our nations healthy and treatable shelter dogs and cats. We received our inspiration for that goal from the unconditional love of a dog named Maddie. Her example led Dave and Cheryl Duffield to promise her that they would honor that love by founding Maddie’s Fund and helping to make this country a safe and loving place for all her kind. It is our hope that you, too, will be inspired by Maddie, and take what you learn here tonight to make that promise come true.

Members of our panel, thank you for being here with us this evening. Our first question is for Jon Cicirelli. “Jon, can you please explain Shelter-Neuter-Return (SNR); is this for all cats brought into shelters or just feral cats? Do all cats get altered and returned to the community they lived in, and what are the guidelines for this program?”

*Jon Cicirelli:*

Thank you, Christie. Also, on behalf of the panel, I want to thank Maddie's Fund for sponsoring this and coordinating this, and thanks for all the attendees, who are participating in sending in questions or may send in questions in a little bit, for us to have this discussion. We all believe this is an important discussion to have and certainly want to be as helpful as we can.

In terms of this question, in San Jose, the way that we qualify cats for a Shelter-Neuter-Return Program, or what some of you folks may have heard called a Feral Freedom Program, is we are looking for pretty healthy cats – you know, no major wounds or illnesses – that are at least four months of age. That is primarily so they can get a rabies shot in California. The limit is four months of age for dogs, even though rabies vaccination is not required. It is also to ensure that they are going to be okay outside, and cats that aren't that friendly behaviorally. They are not soliciting attention from us. They do not want to climb in our lap, but, otherwise, they are just physically healthy. Cats that are in environmentally sensitive areas do not qualify for the program – those are the areas that are declared refuges or anything like that for wildlife – because we are trying to relieve those conflicts, and even several of our parks in San Jose participate in some level. San Jose does it a little differently than some of the other models out there. We are the government agency, and we partner with a non-profit.

In most forms of these kinds of programs, the non-profit takes the feral cats from the shelter at the end of their holding period. Then the non-profit does its thing – the neutering and all the medical services – and then they return the cats to where they were found.

In San Jose, we do the medical stuff. We do all the spaying, the neutering, during the holding period while the cat in our shelter, and then we release it a non-profit, who then takes it back. They manage the educational materials, the website and the phone line for questions and concerns. You can see there on the bottom of this slide, there is a website for reference. Thank you.

*Christie Keith:* Okay. Our next question is for Holly Sizemore. And it's: "Holly, the public, including local veterinarians, often have strong opinions about community cats; chief of among of them is that 'they are better off dead,' in quotes, 'than suffering outdoors and cared for.' Dr. Hurley presented data about why that's not an accurate way of looking at the issue, but how do you actually educate those community members and get them on board?"

*Holly Sizemore:* Thanks Christie. I also want to echo that I am really honored to be on this panel, and want to thank Maddie's Fund, fellow panelist, and the

participants. First, I think in terms of the “better-off-dead” argument, it can really get some animal lovers a little riled up. I suggest firsthand that you let the person know that you understand that viewpoint.

And if it’s true, let them know that you, too, were skeptical about TNR until you learned more about it. I know I was. Jon Cicirelli says that in his presentation. It is a common theme amongst people I talk to who are now enthusiastic TNR converts, so to speak. They all say pretty much the same thing – that they were skeptical until they saw firsthand how well it worked. TNR and SNR can be a counterintuitive concept for many and acknowledging that right away can go a long way in having the other party even be willing to listen to you.

This site talks here a little bit about the tipping point. For those of you who are not aware what the tipping point is, it is that magic moment when an idea, trend, or social behavior crosses a threshold, tips, and spreads like wildfire. That is the Malcolm Gladwell definition. That really has already happened with TNR, as a whole, just regular Trap-Neuter-Return.

If you look at this graph, you see that we have already hit that top of the tipping point. Most communities in the U.S. endorse or practice TNR. You are really a laggard if you don’t. However, it is true that the concept of Shelter-Neuter-Return is still in what I would refer to as the “early

adopter” stage, if you look at this chart. The innovators, they were out there doing it: Rick DuCharme, Jon Cicirelli and Best Friends and many others.

Now we are seeing a lot of early adopters. Best Friends is partnering with a number of municipal shelters, who are these early adopters. These shelter-based community cat programs, or SNR programs, they are all hugely successful. Showing others their successes is key in educating the community.

If you want to forward to the next slide, Best Friends has a really great action kit, where you can use – oh, I’m sorry. It must be in another place. But, we have a really wonderful action kit that you can use to educate your community, and the kit gives you – and it’s in the resources section here. The link to the action kit is in the resources section here, and it gives you tips on what you can do prior to approaching your government about endorsing TNR. It includes a sample PowerPoint that you can take to city council. It has frequently asked questions and couple of short videos. One [video], “Why TNR is better than trap and kill?” featuring Jon Cicirelli and others, and another one about our hugely successful program in San Antonio. Really video is a powerful influencer. We have had great response from these videos, so check them out.

*Christie Keith:* That's great. I just want to second that, that video is very useful. I know Maddie's has shared it, ourselves, and people respond really well to it. And, speaking of Jon Cicirelli, our next question is going to back to him. "Jon, what information and data is available comparing the cost of a program like this so-called 'catch and kill' and more conventional TNR?"

*Jon Cicirelli:* Hi again. Thank you. There isn't a ton of data, but I am going to share with you a couple of things that I do know. In particular, I want to look at my own organization. What you can see on this slide is – this is actually a slide I use to talk about what it costs to do large-scale lethal control. The way I talk about that is by breaking down what it costs us to take care of a cat – so that is taking a cat into the shelter, caring for it for several days and ultimately euthanizing it. That average cost for us comes out to about \$233.00. You can see it is the second to last number. The opposing cost for us – just the spay/neuter – is about \$65.00 for a cat. Right there, you can see there is a significant cost savings.

But, the greatest cost savings you are going to see, from a program like an SNR or high levels of TNR that reduce the intake of cats, is the savings from that. For example, in San Jose, after three plus years of this program, we are taking in 3,000 fewer cats than we did those three years ago when we started. If you just do simple math and say each cat only cost you \$100.00 to care for, that would be a savings of \$300,000.00 for cats that



we don't have to care for anymore. That is the kind of money that can really make a difference, and that is the kind of argument you can use – a solid dollars argument with a government officials or other agencies that you are trying to convince to do this. Because the purpose, remember, here with these kinds of programs, is to reduce the number of cats going into the system.

*Christie Keith:* Great. Thanks. Our next question is for Dr. Julie Levy. “Dr. Levy, when TNR or Shelter-Neuter-Return becomes the way to manage cats in a community, does that send a wrong message to citizens? Could they think in the end the best thing to do for the cats is to just leave them outside and not worry about them at all?”

*Dr. Julie Levy:* We hope that this is not the message that people take home for our kitties. We certainly would love to get most of the cats that are adoptable into homes. That is always the best outcome for cats that are socialized. We know that there are a large number of cats that either do not want to live in homes because they are unsocialized, or there may currently just not be enough homes for all of those cats. So, when we see these cats that are happily enjoying each other outside and are clearly fat and fluffy and thriving, we would not want to have an instinct that the best thing we could do is remove them and euthanize them at the local animal shelter. It

is really much more respectful for them to help them continue to enjoy this happy lifestyle that they have.

If you look at the next slide, you can see statistics that are very typical for southern shelters that are high-intake shelters. This is a Florida county shelter that has been taking in 16,000 cats a year or so and euthanizing eight of ten cats that come into the shelter. There are some people that feel like the life on the street is too fraught with risk to make it worth living. But, if the alternative is taking a cat into a shelter like this, which currently has very little chance for live release, I think it is teaching people to have less respect for the lives of cats than more.

If you look at the next slide, this is a picture that was sent to me by one of our colony caregivers in Gainesville. I think it shows how happily cats can live in TNR programs in their communities. These cats, even though they cannot be touched, have loving caregivers that are very concerned about them, have named them, even though they can't tell the black cats apart. They are passionately protective and affectionate towards these cats. This really is the greatest sign of respect for these animals, helping them find the best way to live safely in their community.

*Christie Keith:* Thank you. Our next question is for Rich Avanzino. “Rich, if shelters do not intake cats, do you think that people will take it into their own hands to

reduce the population themselves in a non-humane manner or by hiring exterminators to deal with the cats?”

*Rich Avanzino:*

Well, it is a great question. I would like to put that in context.

Unfortunately, with open-admission shelters and with a lot of effort to make it easy for people to bring in cats, we still have animal abusers in almost every community of the United States, even when it is easy for cats to be surrendered to shelters. There are some bad people, fortunately, a very few number. But, there are some bad people that do terrible things. When we start new programs, it is not unusual for people to talk about, “Oh my gosh, if we don’t do what we have always been doing, then there will be some more suffering.”

For instance, in San Francisco, when I used to be involved with the San Francisco SPCA, and we were supporting feral cat colonies, people worried that people who were animal abusers would go out to the feral cat colonies with baseball bats, and other bad things, and do terrible things to these animals. While that fear existed, and while that concern was real, the reality never came close to any indication that the feral cat colonies were in greater danger by bad people. The same thing as when we implemented owner surrender fees. People said that people would abandon the animals and that the animals would be on the streets and they

would suffer from illness and injury, and hit by – incidents. Those fears never materialized.

Additionally, in California, where it is illegal to trap and bring raccoons to shelters, at least that is my understanding, people do not go out and torture the raccoons or the opossums or the skunks. The vast majority of citizens of our communities respect the fact that these animals are precious, that they deserve our protection. That while they might be a nuisance now and then, there is something that is special about sharing our environment, even with these animals that are in urban and suburban environments that get into garbage cans, make some noise and sometimes cause disturbance. The vast majority of people respect the fact that that is part of what life in our country should be all about – that we are stewards, and we are not here to manipulate and deprive life just because occasionally we have an annoyance. So, yes, there are animal abusers out there, but I think all of the evidence points that when you have these kinds of programs in effect, there is no increased incidence of the animals being harmed.

The alternative is to bring them into shelters, like Julie was saying, and see them die by the millions because we do not have a better alternative. That kind of reality has got to be changed. I think everybody recognizes that killing healthy and treatable dogs and cats in American shelters is a tragedy that deserves to be ended real soon.

*Christie Keith:* Thank you so much, Rich. Thank you. The next question is for Dr. Julie Levy, who has definitely had some experience at this in her community. And, it's a little bit of a long question that we definitely shortened there on the slide, but I am going to read the entire question as it came in so that people can understand the context.

“Dr. Levy, how can we organize to change the minds of local governments that have laws or regulations they say, ‘don’t allow programs like this’? Examples are laws against TNR, bans on the feeding of outdoor cats, requirements in animal control contracts that cats not be returned to their habitat, ordinances that permit or require animal control to pick up so-called nuisance and stray cats, not just dogs, or even laws that require cat owners to keep their cats indoors or on their property.”

*Dr. Julie Levy:* Well, this certainly is a common situation that is faced in many communities. I think the first thing to do, though, is to actually pull a copy of the law and make sure that is what it really says. Because, we have repeatedly found that law enforcement agencies and animal control agencies are working a lot of times off of tradition or off internal policy that is not actually legislated in local laws.

Very often when you go and look for the letter of the law, you have much more flexibility than we thought we had. However, some of the laws are draconian, and they do have these kinds of obstacles in them, in which case it is up to us to have some lobbying effectiveness of our own. In those cases, it is important to get together a small group of respected community leaders, and to address policymakers, as a group, with data, showing why these things need to change.

We recently had a little experience in our community government where we wanted to change some adoption policies in our shelter. We took one of the largest philanthropists and our grant organizer, and we went one-by-one into county offices meeting with our commissioners and our county managers. They were very relieved to see that we were not asking for money, because everybody normally asks for money. We just wanted the flexibility to help the shelter do a better job.

It was amazingly successful. Almost overnight, policies changed and the shelter director was then liberated to be more creative and flexible in their job.

Then, if it does come time to revise the code, I would recommend thinking long and hard before doing that. Because, we have seen disasters, such as Tallahassee, Florida, where a fairly innocent attempt was made to change a code, and then Trap-Neuter-Return opponents got wind of it, and they

ended up with a code that very literally prohibited TNR. So, that backfired. If the code could be better but nobody is enforcing it, or it is not getting in the way, I would probably leave it alone.

However, I would like to share some examples of the Jacksonville Municipal Code, which is my favorite code for community cats. It starts with some description of why the code is written this way. It says that the city “recognizes the need for innovation in addressing the issues presented by feral free roaming and other community cats. To that end, it recognizes that there are community caregivers, and acknowledges that properly managed community cats may be part of the solution to the continuing euthanasia of cats...” And, I have personally never seen a municipal code before that is so poetic in its explanations of why it looks the way it does.

If we can look at the next slide, it defines community cats as: “Any free-roaming cat that may be cared for by one or more residents of the immediate area, who are or are not known, and a community cat may or may not be feral.” This is amazingly flexible. It acknowledges that there might be someone caring for the cat, but we do not know who they are, and that community cats include friendly cats, as well as feral cats, and that “community cats shall be distinguished from other cats by being sterilized and ear-tipped. Qualified community cats are exempt from licensing, stray and at large provisions of this ordinance, and may be

exempt from other provisions directed towards owned cats.” Again, very friendly supportive language that is there to encourage TNR, but not to penalize our friendly free-roaming cats.

On the next slide, they get into more detail about community cat management, and require that cats be sterilized and vaccinated against rabies and ear-tipped. What I love is that it says, “If a person is providing care, the cats must be fed daily and cats must not be allowed to suffer.” But, it actually does not require that there be a known caregiver.

There is a caregiver certification program that may be implemented by the city. This is important because sometimes we have caregivers who are a nuisance. In that case, the city can step in, try to educate that caregiver and certify them. It does not require a caregiver registration or education program. So, again, [it is] extremely flexible, and the code only addresses people when there is a problem.

Then, just a couple of other sort of unrelated code changes that I would encourage other people to look at, if they are updating their code. We are always trying to shorten the length of stay of pets and shelters and get them out sooner. They have defined [that] litters of puppies and kittens less than six months old, without a nursing mother, have no required hold stay. The reason for this is we do not ever want puppies and kittens to be



forced to stay in the shelter, especially if it is a shelter that has the risk of disease. It is much better for them to go straight into foster [care] or to get adopted right away. The reason to have a hold period for stray animals is so that the owner can find them if they are lost. But, we know that litters of puppies and kittens do not run away in mass. There probably is not an owner out there looking for them. It is far better not to require hold period for juveniles, and that is what this code says.

They also specifically exclude feral animals from a hold period. This is very important because effective and efficient Shelter-Neuter-Return programs need to get those cats out immediately. In Jacksonville, the cats are transferred immediately to the spay/neuter program on the day they come into the shelter. They are booked in on paper, but they stay in their traps and are picked up twice a day. There is no reason in the world we would ever want to force a shelter to hold feral cats. It is cruel to the cats and it consumes resources.

Then they describe an interesting intervention, which is to allow spay and neuter to happen during the required stray hold period, which is an ungodly six-day period in Jacksonville. They say that due to the low reclaim rate and high euthanasia rate for cats, all cats that do not have a positive traceable identification may be sterilized immediately upon intake and placed in adoption as soon as two days after impound. So, they still

have to hold them six days, but they can start moving the cats through the system earlier. Great code. We can make [it] available in the resources, the entire code, if people are interested.

*Christie Keith:* That's fantastic, Dr. Levy. Thank you. That is going to be enormously useful to the people who are inquiring about this. I believe you also wrote an article about this that is on the Maddie's Fund website, so there is additional information about that available to people there.

Our next question is going back to Jon Cicirelli: "Jon, is there any evidence to what happens to cat intake levels at other shelters in the area when one shelter implements the admission/release procedures that you were suggesting? For example, when San Jose Animal Shelter changed its practices, were there any recorded impacts upon other shelters or the community in general?"

*Jon Cicirelli:* Thanks. Yeah, when we started our program – in San Jose, we are actually part of a Maddie's Fund-inspired coalition. We have five brick and mortar shelters in our county, San Jose being one of them and four others. One of the other shelters is actually a partner of ours in the SNR program. But, the other three, actually, kind of looked at us crazily when we started the program. They were sort of wondering, and they kind of stepped back and were like, "Okay. Let's see what happens," you know.

Interestingly, as soon as we started reporting results of them and telling them what was going on with the program, they all started adopting the same program.

So the slide I have presented here is our county of which, again, we are one of five shelters in our county. You can see overall intake for all of us is going down. Nobody had reported increases in cat intake. Partly, of course, that is due to the fact that they also started doing the program. But, also, there is not this movement of cats from community-to-community, at least not that we are able to measure.

I do not have good data on every community where programs like this are enacted, what happens to the nearby shelters. In fact, there are enough of these programs now that it is actually getting hard to keep track of everybody who is starting or trying one.

I can tell you though, last month, I was also contacted by – actually Dr. Hurley was contacted through her website, but she shared with me – a small organization in Central Pennsylvania who started a similar program in 2010 for community cats with one of their cities. They quickly ran out of cats to take care of, or have in the program, because it was reducing the intake of cats. They were taking care of all the feral cats. They had expanded to four total cities, same problem; they ran out of cats. Now,

their plan for this year is to expand to the rest of the county. In fact, now, even though they are sort of founded and based on this community cat kind of programming, they are planning to stretch out and reach out to start helping dogs in their community too, because they are finding they have the bandwidth. Those are two examples where intakes did not go up in other places; they just kept going down.

*Christie Keith:* Great. Thank you. The next question is somewhat related, and this one is for Dr. Kate Hurley. “Dr. Hurley, does any community that you know of keep statistics on the number of complaints coming in after the shelter stops accepting cats, or complaints that went above the shelter level to the local government, such as a board of supervisors? And, how many other communities are not taking in community cats that you know of? Is there a lot of support in the animal sheltering world for this kind of change?” That’s a very big, long question, but I know that you have been very active in these issues in California in the last year or so. I’m hoping that you have some answers for our questioners.

*Dr. Kate Hurley:* Yeah. So far, we have been talking more about Shelter-Neuter-Return, but just to remind you on the next slide is another option that I mentioned in the previous webinar – especially for those shelters that don’t have a big grant, and maybe for some shelters it costs less than \$65.00, so less than the cost of a spay to intake and euthanize a cat, or for whatever reason.

Today, Shelter-Neuter-Return is not an option. Today, if a cat is admitted, it is going to mean euthanasia for that cat, or euthanasia of another cat, whether intentionally or due to overcrowding of the shelter. So, in terms of the answer to the question of how many shelters have adopted that program, I want to remind the audience that it does not have to be a wholesale adopt or not adopt. For some shelters, it is just giving themselves the freedom to say, “You know what? It’s the middle of August and we are chalked full. And, if this cat comes in today, it is going to cause a problem. So, we are going to ask one cat to wait, or we are going to ask people to wait for a week.”

I am going to present a few studies though, from shelters that have gone more whole hog in deciding that they did not have the resources to manage intake of feral cats, or in one case, healthy stray cats in general, and how that has gone.

On the next slide, this is an article that I read about Pasco County, Florida saying no to feral cats in that community on some of the rationale that some shelters are going through. They were charged with a goal of saving 90 percent of their animals, and they were not able to make that a reality as long as they were admitting feral cats for whom they did not have a live release option.

Some shelters are able to solve that by implementing an internal Shelter-Neuter-Return program, but sometimes that does not make sense and it is not necessary. Sometimes, there is already a program in the community. That is highlighted later in the article in the next slide, where there is already a group that is doing TNR. Moving the cat through the shelter just adds unnecessary expense and risk. The shelter can just redirect citizens to say, “Hey, if you have a problem with a feral cat, then here’s the number to call.” So, sort of changing the map, as I discussed in the last webinar, where people are remarkably pliable in, for the most part, doing what we direct them to do.

Sometimes it is just reminding ourselves that we have the freedom to ask them to do something different from what we have already asked them to do. That has been a consistent theme in the feedback I have gotten – that people just are more willing and less “complaining” than anybody expected them to be. I think that I have heard Jon Cicirelli say that about the Shelter-Neuter-Return program, as well.

On the next slide, this was a shelter that went even further and just said, “You know, there is a good adoption organization in this community already. There is TNR going on in this community already. We’re a small shelter with not a lot of resources. We’re going to focus on taking in

and caring for sick/injured orphaned kittens that really need our care, and we're not going to take in healthy stray cats. We're going to redirect our efforts instead to work with citizens to find other alternatives or work with organizations in our community that are already offering those services.”

I think one of the interesting things is to look at how these different programs have been presented. I was shocked by that. I was like, “Really? Wow. Not taking in healthy strays at all?” The feedback that, you know, again, was received is – except for a few people that I have been unable to have a reasonable conversation with, which there is always some of those. Once we explain to people why we have changed our policies, they usually understand.

Word is out. We had a gentleman come in and say he knows we do not except feral cats, but where can he get traps to do a TNR? In the past, maybe that gentleman would have just brought the cats into the shelter not really thinking about what the consequences would be. When we create a slight barrier and give citizens pause in that whole process, often times they are very amenable to going a different path.

The next slide. Research has found that often times behavior that we think is very difficult to change, really just requires a little bit of guidance to help people make the choices that we would like them to make. We are

really the ones who know what's at stake and what's best for both the animals and the community. Go on.

One of the great things in the communities where the shelter has said, "Hey, we're not going to continue taking in cats if that is going to mean euthanasia of that cat," the community, themselves, has stepped up to fill a void that was never really recognized before. In that community – and that is Chico City – several groups are involved, including a new group that was formed to specifically do TNR.

The great thing there is that all the groups are basically sharing the same message. I think that speaks to the question that Jon addressed, too. As long as all the groups are onboard with this program, all the groups can share information with community members about alternative strategies to manage cats, and intake does not need to be redirected to another shelter or another organization. We all need to help solve the problem in another way other than euthanasia.

Next slide. I think that is a really important part. This also speaks to the concern of, "Are people just going to do nothing?" There are a lot of things that are "not admitting a cat to a shelter for euthanasia", and are not "nothing." This was a roadmap for staff that the Director of the Chico City Shelter prepared to interview citizens, who are calling about a cat that



they previously would have brought into the shelter – to find out what was going on, what were the risks for the cat, what was the problem for the people, and come up with an answer that was another solution, whether that was referral to another group or solving the problem in another way. Go on. They have had very dramatic results, a 75% decrease in intake from implementing the program. For most cats, other solutions can be found. For the 25% that are sick or injured, or orphaned, or part of a cruelty case or part of a special nuisance situation, they have so much more ability to really provide good care. And, also time to think about what they are going to say to the people who call. They have time to spend time on the phone. Next slide. Her report was that it was actually getting easier over time. Citizens are coming to expect it and her staff is reporting that they are getting a lot better at having these conversations with people.

Next slide. In terms of who else is catching on, this is an article from last week: “Don’t freak out over new feral cat policy.” This is the current county shelter in California that is quite a high volume shelter. Again, it does not have all the details worked out but it does not have the resources to implement full scale SNR. At the same time they are dealing with this constant influx of feral cats. As a first step, they are asking community members to handle it in a different way, to work with other TNR groups in the community while they look at what they can offer themselves. I think

that is a really important thing for us to communicate – both for us presenters to communicate to you in the audience and for us in sheltering to communicate to our community members – is that saying no to intake when it is going to mean euthanasia does not mean just saying, “No, I’m not going to help you.”

[There are] lots of resources we can give people who have found a cat, to help find the owner, to help rehome the cat, to help them keep the cat and take good care of it, if they decide to go that route, or resources to coexist with the cat. If it is a cat that is appropriate for adoption but there is just not room right now, using managed intake and saying not “no” forever, but just “no today and bring it in later. We’ll call you when we have room.”

*Christie Keith:* Great. Thank you Dr. Hurley. The next question is somewhat related to the last two in theme. This is another one that we were asked in many different ways by many different people, and it is directed to Holly Sizemore of Best Friends. “Holly, in areas where this program has been implemented, is there a problem of people trapping cats and dumping them in the middle of nowhere when they know they can't take them to a shelter? Or a problem that the cats will be brought back if they do take them back to the area, where they are perhaps perceiving them as a nuance or at risk, if they do take them to the shelter?”

*Holly Sizemore:* Well, obviously, someone who is going to engage in abandonment is probably not going to talk much about it. To my knowledge, this is never happened, where someone has been caught abandoning a cat, and they said, “It was because I went to the shelter and they wouldn’t accept this cat,” or, “TNR was the only option.” I have never known that to happen. Again, that may happen occasionally, but referring back to what Rich was saying earlier. There may be a few bad seeds, but most people know abandonment is illegal. The benefits of such a program far outweigh those few isolated incidents where that may occur.

I want to talk a little bit about the Best Friends Community Cat Programs. We do programs in a number of different cities across the U.S., and they differ slightly, but this is the gist of our SNR program. [At] the cat center of the shelter, the eligibility of the cats for TNR is determined, and that can differ from community to community. A lot of our programs do release tame cats. I will let the group know that, and that can be a little bit different from some other programs. The eligible cats, if they are fat, healthy, and they are at risk of dying because of space or anything, and they have been known to be living outdoors, that is usually the eligibility. They are then returned to their impound locale. All the cats in the return area, we attempt to TNR everybody else, and then we attempt to mitigate nuisance issue. Really, I think our programs, like Kate was saying, we

work to help people solve the problem. Our motto is: “Whether you love or loathe cats, we’re going to help you.”

If you go to the next slide, we have a great video on our website, too, about humane cat deterrents. A lot of people – some complainants do not want to watch the video. I will give them that. Sometimes it does take a one-on-one conversation. I think this is a really great tool for people to learn about what options are available, because there are legitimate nuisances that are sometimes created. A lot of complainants do not want to pay for deterrents, but I have known a number of shelters who have successfully gotten grants to buy cat deterrents, because it is a pretty easy pitch.

Going on to the next slide, I also want to talk about our programs in terms of what we do. We do our work in plain sight. This is our van for our San Antonio, our Albuquerque program actually. We definitely are not hiding and releasing the cats out at midnight; however, we also do not make it, what I would call “a battle” between the impounder and our program. Upon intake, we do attempt to determine the nature of the relationship between the cat and the trapper or impounder.

When I began this work, one of my biggest surprises was how many people were both the cat caregiver and the cat trapper. Many of them,

they loved the cats, but they simply became overwhelmed by the numbers and did not know of any alternatives. Of course, those folks are really easy to deal with. We can give them the right resources and send them on their way. But, if someone brings in a cat and says, “This cat has been hanging around my house yowling and bothering us,” we don’t say, “Well, tough luck, it’s coming back.” We may give them information on cat deterrents; we impound the cat, and then we TNR it, which obviously will probably take care of the yowling. Then we return it in our well-marked van that you see here, and we leave door hanger information educating the community about TNR.

It is possible that type of trapper might learn that cat has come back, but by in large, most trappers do not complain that they see the cats again. A very tiny minority do. That is why you need to be sure if you are going to do such a program, gather testimonials from all the multitudes of people who are going to love the program, and then that will help offset the few who really do get riled up about it.

*Christie Keith:*

Great. Thank you. The next question is one that was asked by several people, and it is also one that most of the members of the panel tonight had things to say about. I’m going to direct it first to Dr. Hurley, and then we will see who else on the panel would also like to respond.

Before I ask the question, though, I just want to remind the panel that we are about halfway through our time, and we are not halfway through our questions. If we could start trying to keep the answers a little bit shorter that would probably make sure that we are able to get some of the questions in that are coming in live while you are speaking tonight.

Dr. Hurley, we are going to start this out with you, and then you can pass it along to the other panelists when you are done. “In all this discussion, there has been no mention of the role of” – although that’s actually not true now, but I think they are referring to the first webcast – “there has been no mention of role of feral colony caretakers. We could never recruit enough volunteers to manage the number of cats you’re talking about. What is the role, if any, of managed colonies in this new paradigm?”

*Dr. Kate Hurley:* I am going to go back to a slide that I presented in the last webinar, just reminding us of the general health of community cats that I present to TNR clinics and they present to shelters. Remember, when we talk about these programs, we are only talking about targeting cats that present healthy and in good body condition. If they are emaciated, if they are injured, then we are going to admit them to the shelter and find another solution. I think the question is: “Do cats need to be part of managed colonies to survive?” I think we actually already know the answer.

Next slide. If you think about, “How are most community cats cared for? Where do most community cats live?” Do they live in a big old colony with 20 or 30 cats and a formal caregiver, or are they living in one’s and two’s in backyards and alleys, by dumpsters and on people’s back porches? The answer from multiple research studies is that, for the most part, un-owned cats live singly or in small groups. The average number of cats is between about 2.6 and 4, with an overall average of just around 3 cats being fed. The vast majority of cats are not part of managed colonies.

Here is the good news in that. In these same studies, we found that up to one in four households feed cats that they do not own. So next slide. That is an awful lot of involuntary volunteers. There are a lot of people already out there taking care of cats. I was so enthusiastic; I said that Self-Neuter-Return helps these volunteers do a good job and the right thing. It all blended together on that cartoon.

When we decriminalize feeding cats and bring it out from the underground, we can actually contact more people who are doing this activity and help make sure that they are doing it right – that they are doing it responsibly, that they are managing the impact on neighbors and other animals, and getting the cats spayed/neutered and vaccinated.

*Christie Keith:* Before we go on, do any of the other panelists want to respond to that question, or do you all feel comfortable with Dr. Hurley's answers?

*Holly Sizemore:* Yeah, this is Holly. I love Dr. Hurley's answer. I would say our definition of a managed colony, here at Best Friends, is that even if there are one or two cats, if there is someone who is caring for it, we consider it a colony and managed. We look at it a little bit differently but agree wholeheartedly with the concept. Many of these animals are coming in healthy and happy, and we can assume that they are being cared for.

*Christie Keith:* Anybody else? Okay. I'm going to go ahead and move onto the next question, which is for Rich. "Rich, this is a big picture question: The concept of the open-door or open admission shelter has been an important one in sheltering for a long time. Does this paradigm change for community cats mean retiring that term in practice, and if so, doesn't that seem like a change people will have a hard time accepting?"

*Rich Avanzino:* Well, Christie, I am an old dog, and in the 35 years that I have been involved in this work, like it or not, we are experiencing a phenomenal amount of change. Change is hard. When I think back to when I started my career in animal welfare, we did not have cell phones. We did not have personal computers. We did not have social media. In the animal world, we were euthanizing at the very beginning, with something called a



high-altitude chamber, to put an end to an animal's life. There was no such thing as spay and neuter before release. People had not even thought of the idea of vaccinating on entry. Feral cat colonies were taboo, and TNR was hardly a fledgling idea.

All of those things demonstrated to me that while it is in fact difficult to find a new path, our industry, and society in general, has to embrace change. There is no alternative if we stagnate and stay back in the past, if we don't look to the future and figure out what our real role is. I mean it is our role to end the euthanasia of healthy and treatable animals.

I don't think there is anybody in our work that does not honestly believe that. Even though it is going to be uncomfortable sometimes to embrace new ideas, to try new approaches and to radically rethink what we have done in the past and what we have to do to be a better steward in the future, we are going to do it even if we do not want to. Because, that is what is going to be demanded by society, by funders, by municipalities and by the people of this country who love their animals. When we ask people who have pets, "What do you think of your relationship?" They say they are family members, and we are not treating family members right when they go to shelters, if we are killing them by the millions.

*Christie Keith:* Thank you, Rich. Our next question is for Dr. Levy again. “Dr. Levy, how should the issues of feline leukemia and FIV in feral cats and kittens be addressed by TNR or Shelter-Neuter-Return programs such as the ones you’re advocating?” And, then a number of other questions that are similar: “Do you test; if so, and if they are positive, should they be returned to the community? What about mildly sick cats that are not positive for feline leukemia or FIV with eye discharge and/or some degree of upper respiratory infection?” I realize that question could be answered with a textbook, but I just want to remind you that we are needing to move it along.

*Dr. Julie Levy:* This is one of the most controversial topics among veterinarians and medical directors of these types of programs, and it is one that we have studied extensively in our program. If you go to the next slide, you will see a study that we reported in the *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association*. We had test results from over 18,000 pets and feral cats nationwide. We divided the data into cats that were healthy at the time of testing and cats that were sick. We also looked at if cats were indoor pet cats, outdoor pet cats or feral cats.

If we just start with the graph on the left, you see that, naturally, indoor cats have the lowest infectious disease rate, but interestingly; outdoor cats and feral cats have had exactly the same rates of infection, if they were

healthy. That is not surprising, because they have the same risk. They are out roaming outside and encountering other cats.

Now, if we move over to the right side where we look at sick cats, things change a little bit. Again, our indoor cats are healthier, are less likely to be infected than our outdoor cats, and this is where we see the sick feral cats start to come up as a higher rate of infection for both FELV and FIV. There are several reasons why this might be. One is that in programs that do not normally test cats in TNR programs, they might just test the sick ones in order to make some decisions about those. There might be some preferential testing of feral cats if they are sick, or they might just truly be more likely to be infected.

Our take-home message for this is that if the cats look healthy, they are no more likely to be infected than a pet cat is. We should not have different standards for them, and no one is forcing pet owners to test their cats. No one is forcing pet owners to kill their cats if they are positive. So, in our program, we have made the strategic decision to put all of our resources into neutering more cats, and we no longer test. We will say that we have tests on hand, in case we want to use the test as a tiebreaker in a cat that we are on the fence about.

Of course, cats going to pet adoption homes and foster programs, they are all tested. That is how we have chosen to utilize our resources for the greatest good. The good news is that both FELV and FIV are largely controlled by neutering. FELV is primarily spread from infected mothers to their newborn kittens. Of course, there are not any newborn kittens after cats are spayed. FIV is spread primarily among tomcats that fight, and that fighting behavior is almost eliminated by castration. We actually believe we can reduce these infections faster simply by using our resources to neuter more cats.

*Christie Keith:* Dr. Levy, the next question is also for you. It is a little different. “Dr. Levy, Dr. Hurley described the hell and stress a feral cat endures when confined in the first webcast. What can be done with community cats brought in to be neutered and released when they have conditions that need treatment for several days, such as a broken leg or URI (upper respiratory infection)?”

*Dr. Julie Levy:* Sure. This is a common problem that we encounter. The first step is that we always handle these cats covered. Whether they are coming in traps that are covered with a sheet, or whether they are being carried in a carrier around the clinic, if we keep them covered, that will help them feel safe. I also really love double compartment housing for feral cats that need to be housed in the clinic. This allows you to move the cat to one side for

cleaning, and it also allows you to cover the front of the cage so that the cat can hide while you work in the other compartment.

I have shown here a picture of really nice housing for feral cats. We would of course, just hang a towel or a cage cover over the front, but that allows us to very safely handle the cat. Then, finally, here is a picture of these feral cat dens, and these must be in every single cage. They are perfect for managing feral cats. The cats will naturally run in and hide. You can close that little porthole and then handle the cat. Some other things that are important – now we have an antibiotic called Convenia, which will last a week or more with a single injection. That is perfect for eliminating some of the handling for daily care for feral cats that have wounds or infections that need to be treated.

*Christie Keith:* Great. Thank you. The next question is for Holly. “Holly, if you do TNR a cat at a shelter, is it inhumane to release them to an unfamiliar neighborhood, or is it prudent that we release them close to where the cat was trapped?”

*Holly Sizemore:* They need to be released close to the location where they trapped. All of the Best Friends Community Cat Programs instill upon the field officers and impound staff that very clear and correct impound location information is essential. It is important to us to release very close to the

impound site. Now, in the rare cases where you may need to relocate, we will be talking about that in a bit.

*Christie Keith:* Okay. Great. Thank you. Dr. Levy, we're coming back to you again. "If deciding to release kittens through TNR, whether feral or stray kittens, and fostering or socializing adoption are not options, what is the minimum recommended age and weight to release back to the community? And since the feral kitten survival rate is so low, what would you suggest doing with feral kittens who are over two or three months, who are harder to socialize than very young kittens?"

*Dr. Julie Levy:* For cats that are heading to adoption programs, we will do neutering very young, if the kittens are fat and healthy – so a pound and a half, six weeks or older, for fat kittens, of course, always looking at the condition of the cat. There are some cats that are four pounds, but too scrawny, and we would not do them. Our TNR programs present some other challenges, because we are going to release these kittens back to the field. We do know that they have a relatively low survival rate, just like all other free-roaming animals, such as rabbits and raccoons. Life in nature is hard, and it is nature's strategy in litter bearing species to have a low survival rate. Our program, because we are in a rabies endemic state, will only admit cats for TNR that are 12 weeks of age or older, so that they can have a

valid rabies vaccine. That means that a tipped ear means they have had at least one valid rabies vaccine. That is what we do routinely.

Occasionally, we will neuter cats younger if they have a caregiver that is going to be looking out after them, and we think it is the only time that we are going to get our hands on the cat. But, generally, we pick somewhat arbitrarily, 12 weeks, which is about three pounds for our TNR program.

*Christie Keith:* Okay. Our next question is for Dr. Hurley, and this is a big one. So, I'll remind you again about the time. "Dr. Hurley, how can we balance the lives of free-living cats and those of the wildlife they prey on? This is compounded by, "What if there are endangered or threatened species in the area?" We also had a couple of questions from people who lived in island environments, such as Hawaii, asking about any special considerations about their communities.

*Dr. Kate Hurley:* I am going to fly through these slides because there are a few of them, partly because this seems to be one of the biggest stumbling blocks. If you could go to the next slide, really the question is, as this magazine article put it so plainly about a month ago: "Must cats die so birds can live?" Because, we are not talking about discontinuing any of the other things that we have been doing to promote responsible cat ownership, and spay/neuter, and coexisting with wild animals and with domestic pets in a responsible way. We are talking about discontinuing euthanasia of our

cats and either replacing it with Shelter-Neuter-Return or other strategies to coexist with these animals.

This is really a two-part question. Part one is: “Is eradication of cats necessary for the protection of wildlife on lizards or in general, and, if so, is shelter euthanasia an effective way to accomplish this?” An answer to part one: Really, it varies. We know that cats prey, there is no secret about that. They prey on about six times as many mammals, so rodents and rabbits, as they do birds. The impact of predation is not even. Like other predators, predation tends to be targeted at weak, sick, injured animals that may be less fit for survival in general.

There are many conservationists who believe that predation does not actually cause mortality; it replaces mortality from another cause. The animals that are preyed upon likely would succumb to another cause of mortality. That is on a sort of a macro population level. On a microenvironment, like an island, like a sort of urban island that is defined by specific parameters, in fact, the impact of predation is unpredictable. In some cases, it actually can help some species, and harm others. Removal of the predator, likewise, has unpredictable effects.

This is an article that just came out in *Conservation Biology* looking at the effect of wildlife services and control of predators on a large scale in the



United States. Looking at a meta-analysis of predator removal in 113 systems found that prey populations actually declined in 54. In almost half of the cases, removal of the predator actually reduced the abundance of the prey species it was designed to protect. Often times, that is because the predator was also controlling other species that might have competed for food, for nesting sites or might also have preyed on the species of interest.

On the next slide, I show an example where that actually happened with cats. There are multiple examples of this as well, where cats were removed, and, lo and behold, rabbits proliferated out of control with even more devastating effect on the animals that were trying to be protected.

The answer to question one is: “Do cats need to be eradicated in order to protect wildlife?” Well, not all the time. In some microenvironments, predation by cats is actually beneficial to some native species. It is particularly likely be beneficial to birds in some cases because they prey preferentially on rodents that might otherwise eat a bird’s eggs or compete for resources. In some microenvironments, small islands, it has been demonstrated to be helpful to remove cats. Most probably, in most of the United States and in most urban areas even in Hawaii or a larger island, where the habitat is already very disrupted by humans and many other species, probably the effect of predation is neutral.

The reality is, and this is difficult, but specific research is necessary in each microenvironment where we might consider attempting to eradicate cats as a predator in order to serve a prey species. We need to follow up in those environments to make sure that eradication of cats did not trigger an unintended cascade of negative consequences.

Then, what about part two? In those instances where we say eradication of cats would be a good idea, or maybe we just want to do it just in case that might help the species of wildlife that are at risk, is shelter euthanasia a good tool for this? And this is the part of the question that gets a lot less discussion, but it is really a lot more important. No matter what you might think about how good of an idea it is to eradicate cats, if shelter euthanasia is not a good tool to do that, then we are not good partners in that process and we might as well stop our part.

Here is the reality. I talked about this last time. At least 50% removal is required for eradication. There is an estimated 30-80 million un-owned cats in the United States. Nobody believes that we are euthanizing more than about 2 million in our nation's shelters. Rich Avanzino just gave an estimate even a little bit lower than that. Nobody is trying to increase that number, and yet if you just do the math on that, we would have to up our euthanasia between 8 and 20 times as much in order to hit that 50% goal.

Every study is consistent in reporting that removal, short of eradication, is not useful. It simply leaves a niche open that is filled by other animals. It leaves more resources available; other animals reproduce to fill that spot. Next slide. This study is a good reality check on what it really takes to eradicate cats, and how shelter euthanasia potentially fits in. This is a review of feral cat eradication on islands, and these were all smaller islands, quite a bit smaller than, say, Hawaii. On average, in successful campaigns, three different eradication methods were used. The top three were leghold traps, hunting and poisoning. On small islands where eradication was achieved, it was using methods that we cannot imagine would be acceptable on any kind of scale in the U.S.

The real question we should be asking, presented on the next slide, is not “Must cats die so birds can live,” but “Can cats die so birds can live?” And the real answer to that, on the next slide, is no. We cannot euthanize enough cats through shelters to eradicate them even on a fairly small scale, such as on a mid-sized island, and the methods that would be successful in eradicating cats simply would not be tolerated. If we discontinue that activity as an apparent solution to the problem, where we think we are helping birds by euthanizing some of the cats, and we are really not, we can focus our attention on better solutions. I just want to skip past the

next couple of slides, which are an example from another species. You can certainly look at those on your own.

What are all the ways that we can support the lives of free-living cats and the lives of the wildlife they prey on? Well, there are lots of things that we can do. This is taken from the *Portland Audubon* website, which really has nothing to do with cats but [has] profoundly effective methods to help wild animals, acknowledging that euthanizing a few of the cats is not one of those things that we even can do, even if we would.

Here is the great news about Shelter-Neuter-Return, if you think just in case maybe it's a good idea to have fewer cats out and about in communities; well, the evidence is strong and building that Shelter-Neuter-Return accomplishes that as well as making lives better for the cats that are targeted. San Jose, as Jon mentioned, has seen a 25% decrease in intake and also almost a 20% decrease in the number of DOA (dead on arrival) cats that are picked up. [That is] evidence that there are fewer cats out and about causing risks for wildlife. And, that is my answer.

*Christie Keith:* Thank you.

*Dr. Kate Hurley:* I just wanted to mention really quickly that in Jon's program, as in other programs, it is important to find solutions other than return for those cats

in really sensitive microenvironments. When we are not filling our shelters with all the cats, we can really do that in those microenvironments where it is needed.

*Christie Keith:* That is great. Our next question is actually about relocation, and it is for Holly Sizemore. “Holly, what happens to established, managed colonies if they experience a change in care, such as cessation of feeding or nearby development, or as Dr. Hurley mentioned, other reasons that the community may have for wanting to move them? Do they relocate themselves, or do we need to relocate them? And, if relocation has to be done, what makes it successful?”

*Holly Sizemore:* Well, what we [do] in our programs is when we release the shelter cat, we go out and try to identify his buddies. That way we can get entire colonies fixed. We are out in the field a lot talking to neighbors. What we have found in our experience is that often times cats do have multiple caregivers. A lot of times these caregivers do not even know about each other, so we help network those caregivers amongst one another. If people do call us that don't – have not had interaction with us or our program, we encourage caregivers, who may no longer be able to care for their colonies, to talk to their neighbors and find out if someone else is feeding them. They are often times a lot of people feeding the same cats. Then, make arrangements for someone else to take over, and slowly move the

food source towards the other caregiver property to ensure all cats know where to go. Where there are no other alternatives, because relocation is time intensive and marginally successful in some cases, you have to do it right and it takes a lot of resources.

We advise people on when you need to relocate. You really need to do good research about how to do it appropriately, and we even loan out relocation equipment since it is so important to securely confine the cats in an enclosed area for two to four weeks. You need to be able to do it in a really secure manner.

This slide here is about two of our newest programs in Albuquerque and San Antonio. It shows the successes with significant decreases in euthanasia as a percentage of all the outcomes and significant increase in live release rates. It is that we focus most of our effort, 90-95% of our labor efforts, on the actual Trap-Neuter-Return, and the other 5-10% on working to adopt out young kittens, helping with the occasional relocation, when there are no other alternatives, and helping complainants mitigating cat nuisances. We really have not found a need to put too much more energy into some of these alternatives, except in rare situations.

*Christie Keith:* Thank you. Dr. Levy, just a quick word: “What’s your opinion on how successful barn cat programs are? Is this an option for community cats who need to be relocated?”

*Dr. Julie Levy:* I think Holly summarized nicely with the issues of relocating cats. Barn cat programs are just an effort to identify places that might be suitable for cats. Barns usually want to have a few cats around. My experience is that most barns have cats if they have resources that attract cats. So, it can be hard to find them. There are some cats, sometimes, that just might be relocated, as Kate said, from those environmentally sensitive areas or very dangerous areas. I think *The Neighborhood Cats TNR Handbook* has an excellent section on how to relocate cats, and it does involve confinement. I think relocating whole family units together is more likely to be successful and to fight that cat’s natural homing instinct. We agree, and we really try to minimize relocation. But, there are times when it must be done and it can be done.

*Christie Keith:* Great. Thank you. Rich, we have some questions about the economy, of course. “In these hard times when budgets are being slashed, many animal control agencies see this paradigm change as a threat to their job. They feel that if they stop taking in cats, their budgets will be cut even more, and staff will be laid off because of fewer animals to care for. How can

the management at animal control agencies be convinced that this negative outcome won't happen?"

*Rich Avanzino:* Well, history is pretty clear on this. We have reduced populations. If you look at what is happening in the next slide with the number of animals that came into shelters in the seventies, and you look at how many we had just a few years ago and what we are expecting to happen in 2015, we have had death and populations going into shelters plummet in the last forty years. Budgets for animal control have not gone down proportionally. As a matter of fact, I would say that costs for animal control have skyrocketed relative to the number of animals that have been taken in.

The history of our movement is that – and this is probably true of any cause – when you reduce the numbers and you effectively use your dollars to do the right thing, as opposed to continuing practices of the past that actually were contradictory and adversely impacting what your purpose was, that things change.

Also, if you think about the theory that if we reduce animal populations, that that's going to threaten jobs – that would basically say that spay/neuter before release, or spay/neuter programs, are going to be threatening to the employee status of people involved at animal control. I do not think any animal control program speaks negatively about



spay/neuter, and, yet, the purpose of spay/neuter is to reduce the number of animals coming in, so the deaths actually go down.

I think we have all embraced the idea that animal population in shelters have to decrease, making a more effective use of the dollars. Also, in these times, we have not seen animal control – while they have been slashed – we see no indication that there is a desire to take them down even further because we are coming out of the recession. If we can build back the animal control programs, as I believe they should be done, that the dollars should be spent on what our mission and our purpose is, which is to save animal lives, to rehome these animals and to see that our function as an animal welfare community is successful. To basically say we do not want to stop the killing because it will reduce the number of people employed, or it will result in a budget decrease, I think is such a ridiculous argument. I think anybody that would put that out there would be embarrassed to suggest that, because it obviously is totally contrary to why all of us – animal control agencies, humane organizations and animal welfare groups – exist. We are all there to save animal lives. Some of us do it more effectively and less effectively than others, but we are all there for the single purpose of saying that more animals go home and fewer animals get carried out in barrels. To say anything contrary to that, I think is almost heresy in our movement. I do not think the American public could ever accept the idea that we do not want to see fewer animals

coming in and less number of animals killed because it would hurt the job market for people doing animal welfare work.

*Christie Keith:* Great. Thank you, Rich. Because we want to make sure that we can get to the live questions that were submitted, and we still have several questions that were given during the last webcast or during the weeks between, I'm going to really just go through these last few questions very quickly. Please make your answers extremely short.

Jon, this question is for you. It's the question that's been raised before. "There is this 50-75% idea that 75% of cats in an area need to be sterilized to reduce population, but only half would have to be killed or removed. How do we successfully advocate for neuter/release programs because this sometimes gets used against us to support catch and kill?"

*Jon Cicirelli:* The 75% spay/neuter rate, or the 50% death rate, for existing cats are, sort of, hypocrisies from other areas of science that have been speculated about in this area. But, in fact, I am not aware, really, of any area where they got 75% of the cat population and spayed or neutered it. With the exception of perhaps some of those small items that Dr. Hurley was talking about, there is probably rarely a place that has ever euthanized or trapped and killed 50% of the existing cat population. Nor, are any of us advocating that, nor is there money for that – which is something that I talked about in

one of the early slides. The kind of money you would have to have to be able to accomplish that is substantial. In fact, in San Jose, if I went about trying to trap and kill 50% of cats, I would be run out of town. I would not have a job. The public would not accept that kind of program.

How do you advocate then for TNR over catch and kill? First of all, you use the evidence in the data that is available, and that is what this slide is about. It is some evidence. There are many different shelters or communities that are having a similar experience. Use what others have done to demonstrate that this can work.

You also should talk about the money. When you take in fewer cats, you are having fewer expenditures. Your goal is to reduce the number of cats, which reduces the number of nuisances. Targeting through programs, like an SNR program, seems to have a great deal of effect. This program only spays and neuters about 2,500 more cats a year; yet, we have an estimated cat population of 400,000. So, we get nowhere near that 75% neuter mark yet. This is the only program we have changed, and you can see some dramatic results. Quick in a nutshell; we can move onto the next one.

*Christie Keith:* Okay. Thank you. Dr. Hurley, this is your question next, and it is a two-part question. First: “What are the real public health concerns about free-living cats, rabies, parasites, etcetera, and what practical considerations are

there in managing and mitigating them? Second, assuming these risks can be managed or not as significant as many believe, how do we educate the public?”

*Dr. Kate Hurley:* I think this goes back to the same point I was making about wildlife. There are some risks associated with free-living cats. In some cases, those are overstated. Regardless, by euthanizing a small fraction of those cats through shelters, we have not been mitigating those risks, and discontinuing that euthanasia will not increase those risks. What is really important to recognize is that those risks do not come only from cats and cannot be addressed through control of cat populations. We need to educate the public about methods they can take to reduce the risk of roundworm, rabies and toxoplasmosis. The powerful things they can do are things like washing their hands, wearing gloves when they are gardening and covering sandboxes that kids play in. Sorry, I am skipping some of my slides that you all can look at later. I think, really importantly, Shelter-Neuter-Return, again, has a profound effect on reducing public health risk. Rabies vaccination is a part of Shelter-Neuter-Return programs, and by definition, it is targeting the cats that are closely interfacing with people, because those are the ones that get caught and brought into shelters. Then it fills up those niches where somebody was feeding with a vaccinated neutered cat. Toxoplasmosis, roundworm, some of the other things that we are concerned about tend to be diseases of

kittens and young cats. So, again, by stabilizing cat populations we are protecting public health; we are protecting cats; we are protecting wildlife; and, we are making our own jobs easier and better.

*Christie Keith:* Great. Holly, this question is for you. “The idea of leaving cats to live outdoors seems designed for temperate climate areas. In areas with very cold winters, it is not uncommon to see cats come in to the shelter with frostbite. How can this paradigm shift work in areas with harsh weather conditions?”

*Holly Sizemore:* Well, first I would like to make it clear that many cities with TNR programs experience winter lows below freezing routinely for months on end. There are already a lot of communities successfully doing TNR in some pretty cold climates.

If you were to adopt with us, in our program, you may need to decide if all or certain cases of frostbite would make the cat eligible for the program.

It is pretty simple. If the person bringing the cat in was someone who actually cares for the cat, you could say, “Oh, well, do you want a free easy, cheap, winter cat shelter?” There are plenty of resources online about how you can build cheap winter cat shelters. TNR can be done in these climates. It can be done in every climate. You just need to take

certain precautions when you are doing it in very cold or very wet weather, and there are lots of resources online to find out how to do that.

*Christie Keith:* Great. Thank you.

*Holly Sizemore:* So this last slide here, I just want to remind anyone who may be interested in learning more, we are hopeful that we can expand our community cat public/private partnerships next year with one or more new shelters. If anyone is interested, I would love to hear from anyone who would be interested in looking at that opportunity.

*Christie Keith:* Great. Jon, this question is for you, a very timely one. “How can we talk to the media, government, and the public about community cats and wildlife when there is so much anti-cat PR (public relations) making headlines lately?”

*Jon Cicirelli:* So, you know, I think the way to start to answer this question is to ask why there might be anti-cat PR. Primarily lately it is due to wildlife conflicts or perceived wildlife conflicts. Locally, it tends to be nuisance cats or over population of cats. There are too many around, and also locally, the euthanasia of a large percentage of cats is a flashpoint, really, about what’s going on in your local shelter. Communities are generally not happy to see 70, 80, or 90% euthanasia rates in a local shelter.

Those tend to be sort of the anti-cat stuff going around or the controversy surrounding it. The way that you get people to buy on, or you convince people that these kinds of programs work, is to stay firm and clear about what the goals are. All of those things that I have talked about that might create anti-cat PR, are all mitigated by successful TNR and SNR type programs, because you are reducing the number of cats in the community. That is exactly that the public wants, whether the methodology might be in question. If that is your goal – fewer cats and doing it in a non-lethal way – then you would choose all the things to find solutions or you help reduce the problems that every one might complain about, or anyone might complain about, that cats create. That is how you really have to form your argument.

*Christie Keith:* Okay. Great. Thank you. Was that it? I saw you had one more slide.

*Jon Cicirelli:* Yeah, I was trying to move along.

*Christie Keith:* Thank you. Rich, this question is for you, and you already actually kind of touched on this in an earlier question, but I'll just see if you have anything more to add, which is: "How do we deal with the resistance we see in so many organizations to making modifications to benefit animals, which also in the long run benefit the shelter, itself. Intuitional change is

hard. What works when it comes to getting those agencies and groups onboard?”

*Rich Avanzino:*

Well, I think it really works with programs like we've heard about over the last hour and a half. I think we provided some excellent information, which can be used to target the various constituencies of the target groups. For instance, when we are talking to government, it is all about reducing costs. If we are talking to the public, it is the fact that what we have done in the past just does not work. If we are talking to animal lovers, it is about the importance of saving lives and how this relatively easy policy modification can make a sea-change difference in helping our best friends on four legs have happy and wonderful lives. Then if we are talking to shelters and the people working there, this goes to reducing their overcrowding problems, their sickness problems and the tremendous number of animals that are dying. People working in shelters do not want to continue on the way we have done it in the past. Nobody likes to see an animal die. Nobody likes to take a life of an animal that should be able to exist in our environment. If we focus our message to the constituencies and the stakeholders, who are instrumental in bringing about the sea-change difference, then we can be successful. I think what all of our panelists have done, over the last hour and a half, is bring out some excellent, statistical, scientific, fact-based information that could all be utilized in achieving that goal.



*Christie Keith:* Fantastic. This is a question from somebody who is in the audience tonight. “The new paradigm depends on more spay/neuter, more low-cost, accessible or free spay/neuter. But, most rescue groups are already stretched financially. How do you reconcile that?” And if anyone really wants this question – I was thinking Dr. Hurley might want to weigh in, but is there anyone who would like to take it?

*Dr. Julie Levy:* I would like throw in, if that is okay, and then Dr. Hurley can add. I would like to mention that our community cat programs, many of them are thanks to the generous funding of PetSmart Charities. They are a very large funder of spay/neuter programs, and I would encourage anyone interested in growing their spay/neuter programs to check out those opportunities with PetSmart Charities.

*Christie Keith:* Great. Anybody else want to weigh in, or I’ll go to the next question?

*Jon Cicirelli:* This is Jon. I just want to add when you look at some of the examples that I have been giving, and doing things like Dr. Hurley suggests, which is to step back and take a breath, and maybe limit some admissions, you begin to free up some resources to try to do these other programs. Even from existing resources, if you change how you are approaching cat issues in your community, and reduce how much time and effort you have to spend

on sheltering and euthanizing them, then you free up capacity to start investing in a more progressive program.

*Christie Keith:* Excellent. Here is another question from one of the audience members tonight. “How do we overcome the attitudes of animal control agencies who place priority on people in the community who complain of nuisance behaviors and support killing as the solution?” And who would like to take this question? Dr. Hurley, I know you actually spoke a little bit about this, and I think Jon, you have too. Would either one of you like to take it?

*Dr. Kate Hurley:* I think I’ll encourage Jon to take it as animal control.

*Christie Keith:* Jon?

*Jon Cicirelli:* So, you know, I think this is a question that does come up, and I have talked about it in other presentations. One of the things I think that tends to – where you have situations like this – suggest that the relationships typically between the shelter and the community are not as good, probably, as they can be. Trying to enhance that relationship through local non-profits and organizations, through other means, first can sometimes open the doors to these kinds of ideas. So, doing a fundraiser for the local shelter, volunteering or helping them with an event, or down at the shelter,

or with some other program other than something like at TNR or an SNR program, and building that trust helps.

Also, of course, exposing them to this information, you know, this whole idea about how angry the community is going to be, I can tell you is a myth. We have talked about it in some of these slides tonight. We talk about it constantly in our presentations about [how] there are a variety of myths about what might happen. So, helping them to understand or see the data, the surveys and the experiences of agencies that have gone through this and did not have those problems, that helps them to start to see the light. I can tell you, I have these very same conversations with my own colleagues, who I believe respect me and I certainly respect them. Some of them just have an honest disagreement with me that they are still committed to this other path.

The only thing that I would suggest is that over time, I think as Holly showed in her graph early on, we are still in that early adoption phase. But there was a time, like Rich mentioned long ago, where nobody in an animal shelter ever spayed or neutered a single animal. There was a time when nobody ever did pediatric spay and neuter. Everybody had all their reasons and myths for believing why they should not do that. Yet, today, it is a very common practice. I think the same thing is going to come with

community cats. Every week, I think, I am seeing a new community come online and try this.

That just means there is going to be a greater and greater and body of evidence to help convince people that the sky is not going to fall when you do this. In fact, it is going to open up your ability to do better programming, more proactive programming, and provide a higher degree of animal welfare to your community.

*Christie Keith:* Great. Thank you. This is a question that I'm going to direct to Dr. Julie Levy. "What do you do in a raccoon rabies endemic area with regard to annual vaccination for rabies? We have already had several cases of rabies in areas where there are cat colonies where most have been neutered and vaccinated once."

*Dr. Julie Levy:* This is a common question we get in the rabies endemic areas like Florida, and it certainly is ideal to give cats their recommended boosters, but [it is] not very practical. In our program, we actually do offer free boosters, so if the caregivers can bring their cats in traps, we just vaccinate them right through the trap. We always use a product that is licensed for three years, and we know that that will last for three years even though it is labeled for only one year the first time. But the way these vaccines are tested, cats are

vaccinated and they are held for three years before challenged. We know that they actually have very good efficacy.

I would say if there is a report of rabid raccoons around a colony, I certainly would make an effort to revaccinate those cats, but it is not practical to do it for all of the cats in the community. However, I am also still waiting to hear the first report of a cat with a tipped ear being diagnosed with rabies – so if anybody hears about it, I'd like to know. Even that one vaccine is really potent in protecting cats and developing some herd immunity. Internationally, that is the approach that is taken with controlling dog rabies.

*Christie Keith:* Great. Thank you very much Dr. Levy. This next question is – actually I think Dr. Hurley has already had to leave us because we're running a few minutes over. I am thinking, Dr. Levy, this is one that you might want to take, but if anyone else would prefer it, just let me know. This question is: “Is it possible that some of the cats are fearful, less than social, indoor-only, lost cats, but in returning them to the found location, is it possible that owners may have a greater chance of finding their cats given most shelters only hold for three days?”

*Dr. Julie Levy:* I certainly agree with this. Dr. Hurley has presented very nice data to show that cats are – lost cats are much more likely to return home on their

own then to be found in an animal shelter and returned via a shelter. So even a lost cat has a better chance of getting back home if we leave it where it is. If it comes home neutered, all the better.

*Christie Keith:* I am just checking to see if we want to continue with more of the questions. We have run over a little bit on time. But, I'm going to send a few more to the room so that you can all decide. This is a question for someone from Northern Maine, who is new there and is startled by the number of cats living in colonies and old unused barns. I'm really sorry, but the question has just disappeared for me. I am guessing you can probably see it there.

*Dr. Julie Levy:* I can see it. Would you like me to read it?

*Christie Keith:* No, I got it back now. It just blanked out and came back. "What you think, how you would suggest approaching what seems to be an overabundance of un-owned cats in rural poor areas without the potential for community of humane advocates sufficient to care for them?" So in other words, I think we are kind of going back here to the issue of caregivers, caretakers, as opposed to just cats who seem to be living on their own. What are the best ways to approach getting those cats neutered and vaccinated in rural poor areas?

*Holly Sizemore:* I will take a stab at this one. This is Holly. Best Friends is headquartered in a fairly rural area, and we are lucky enough to have good resources that we really we are able to work long and hard – I mean people here care about the cats, too. I would not say that people do not care in rural areas – many, many times they do. Sometimes, in my experience, you just see larger numbers of cats because there have been fewer programs. It really is about taking it maybe one colony, one area at a time. You do need to be thinking in terms of, well, if a lot of these people do care about them and they want to do right by them – it is about educating people who may have not known how to care of these cats appropriately.

I would say you go and help them get all the cats fixed, and slowly, if not immediately, if you are doing it colony-by-colony, you will see the health of those cats improve. I have seen that in rural communities where we start with one farm, and then move to the next, the next, and the next. It does take time, but, overall, you see the health improve.

*Lynne Fridley:* “Do you ear tip Spay-Neuter-Return cats that are already fixed, especially when you have a strong suspicion that they are owned? Our staff is worried that we will ear tip one of the owned cats that 40 percent of Americans let outside.”

*Christie Keith:* Thanks for jumping in on that one, Lynne.

*Jon Cicirelli:*

This is Jon. I'll answer. You know, if you are in a situation where you suspect you have an owned cat, it is a little general to say that. Typically the suspicion that you have an owned cat is often that it is friendly, in which case, in a lot of programs it would just go through the adoption program. It might not necessarily qualify for an SNR program. That is certainly the case in our shelter.

If it was not that friendly, but you still suspected, "Well, somebody must own this cat because it got fixed somewhere along the way," we would ear tip it, and assuming that it did not have any microchips or anything like that, we would put microchips in it. If that cat were not friendly, then its probability of living through the shelter experience is very low in most of our shelters. Even though an owner might get a little upset that you ear tipped their cat, it is certainly better than the alternative you would have previously offered if you were not doing that kind of program – which is that the cat would likely have been euthanized.

I think you have to balance that. There was a question earlier about you might accidentally spay and neuter somebody's cat, or returning a semi-friendly cat, is it more likely to get back home, and of course the answer to those questions seem to be yes. Again, the flipside of that is what would have been the alternative? If the cat was not friendly and could not qualify



for an adoption program, the alternative in the past would have been euthanasia. Now at least the cat has come home, even though it might be minus a couple of parts, it is still going to get back to its owner.

*Dr. Julie Levy:* If I could just jump in – this is Julie – and comment on our program. We actually do TNR to all community cats, whether they are friendly or not. We do not deny cats access to spay and neuter just because they purr. We do ear tip all cats, even if they are already spayed. We have done over 38,000 TNR cases since 1998, and I would say we had less than a dozen complaints about ear-tipped cats. Our code does require that cats wear a license, and nobody puts a license on their cat. Basically any cat that comes into our program and brought by a member of the community is already violating the law. But, it really is not an issue at all for us.

*Christie Keith:* Thank you everyone. That is all we have time for tonight. We, at Maddie's Institute, want to thank Dr. Hurley, Dr. Levy, Jon Cicirelli, Holly Sizemore and Rich Avanzino, as well as all of you who came, for your time tonight. Before you go, please click on the link to take the survey. It might have been blocked by your popup blocker or be on a different screen. If it is, we will be emailing you the link, and we would appreciate it a lot if you could take a few minutes to respond to it. We hope that you have checked out the resources in the widgets at the bottom of your screen. If not, we will be emailing the links to those to you, as

well as sharing a link to the archive version of tonight's webcast when it is ready. We have already published the archive version of the first webcast in this series, which is available on our website at [maddiesinstitute.org](http://maddiesinstitute.org) Then just click on "webcast." Thank you once again to everyone for being here this evening, and keep working for change for cats. Good night.

*[End of audio]*