



The Pet Rescue Foundation

SALLY MACKLER
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FRIEND OF FERALS

Sally Mackler is always looking for opportunities to help animals. She was already volunteering full-time with a number of San Diego animal organizations when she decided it was time to do something for feral cats.

While working the phones for Pet Assistance, a group that refers San Diegans to low-cost spay/neuter resources, Sally began receiving more and more calls from people requesting help altering feral cats—the unowned, semi-tame felines who make their home in parking lots, alleyways, and backyards. But while the need was great, the resources simply weren't there—very few veterinarians were willing to handle feral cats at the time, and with multiple cats to alter, most colony caregivers could not afford even low-cost services. "I realized that we needed a different approach for these cats—they were falling through the cracks of our current spay/neuter program," Sally says. "We needed an accessible, efficient, free program for altering large numbers of feral cats." She decided to make it happen.

As she began networking and considering various options, Sally found a kindred spirit in San Diego veterinarian Dr. Rochelle Brinton. They decided that a free, monthly, MASH-style spay/neuter clinic would best serve the most people and cats. At the first spay/neuter clinic in 1992, Rochelle altered 20 feral cats. The Feral Cat Coalition (FCC) was born.

The next step was to make it work on an even larger scale. So Sally and Rochelle approached San Diego veterinary hospitals with a request: to allow FCC to use the hospitals on an occasional weekend, when the hospital was closed for business anyway. FCC would come in with volunteer veterinarians, technicians, and handlers—as well as their own medical equipment—and alter approximately 100 cats in an afternoon. FCC volunteers would handle all the calls, intake, surgery, and check out, as well as making sure to leave the host hospital immaculate. "We decided early on that we would make participating in FCC clinics easy for everyone," Sally emphasizes.

Sally coordinated volunteers, created an efficient system for handling large numbers of cats, gathered medical supplies and anything else that was needed. Rochelle

recruited and trained veterinarians and gained the San Diego Veterinary Medical Association's formal endorsement.

The monthly clinics were off and running, and the response from the community was overwhelmingly positive—the clinics were filled to capacity each month, more veterinarians and lay volunteers joined in, and donations increased. The clinics were—and are—amazing to behold. Tents and recovery tables fill the host hospital's parking lot, and stations are set up to handle everything from trap cleaning to vaccinations to ear tipping. Surgeries all take place in the hosting hospital's operating room. Thanks to Sally's planning, it all runs like clockwork.

"It is so gratifying to see the results of your work immediately—over 100 cats spayed and neutered in one afternoon. You really get a big bang for your buck with clinics like these," Sally explains. She's right: to date, San Diego Feral Cat Coalition has altered over 12,000 feral cats—funded solely by donations and volunteer labor. Even more impressive, cat euthanasia at San Diego County Animal Control has decreased by over 40% since 1992, when FCC started.

A partnership between volunteers and private veterinarians, the FCC model can work in almost any community. In fact, Sally's work in San Diego has inspired similar programs in Portland, Oregon, North Carolina, Florida, and other areas. In response to the many requests they receive for "how-to" information, FCC has posted a step-by-step guide on their website (www.feralcat.com) and a how-to video will be available soon.

Although Sally left San Diego for Medford, Oregon, the Feral Cat Coalition went on to become a San Diego institution and an invaluable resource for those wanting to help feral cats.

And Sally? Of course she's still helping animals. Once she arrived in Medford, she started from scratch and built an organization, Spay/Neuter Your Pets (SNYP), to provide low-cost and free spay/neuter for pets and feral cats. Sally works at each SNYP clinic, recruits and trains volunteers, drives to Portland to help out at their feral cat clinics, and, in her "spare time," humanely traps feral cats for spay/neuter.