

Grey Whiskers Senior Cat Program

Project title: Grey Whiskers Senior Cat Program

Organization: Whiskers

Project lead(s): Jessica Vigos

Project completed: 4/30/20

Grant amount: \$10,000

Project Type (Basic, Phase 1-4): MIL Phase 1

Topics: Foster Programs; Adoptions/Adoption Programs

Project Summary: This Whiskers study aimed to rescue and place 120 senior cats from three municipal shelters. The goal of the foster-based, Grey Whiskers Senior Cat Program is to develop key fosters, hospice fosters and adopters who are interested in saving senior cats ages seven and up. The study identified key target adopter pools, including senior citizens. The study took in 105 senior animals, 75 (71%) of which were adopted into loving homes, including those with kidney disease, stomatitis, chronic nasal issues or specific dietary needs. Due to untreatable conditions (e.g., heart failure, cancers), 14 (13%) were eventually euthanized. At the end of the study, 15 (14%) were still in Whiskers' care. The largest pool of adopters was in the age ranges of 30-45, attributed to the use of social media to network cats. Elderly adopters, ages 65+, accounted for 8% of adopters.

The objective of the project was: to quantify the reduction of euthanasia of senior cats.

Methods: During the study period from November 1, 2019 through October 6, 2020, 105 cats ages seven and up were taken into the program. Veterinary care was administered to the cats, as needed. Data (e.g., adopter age ranges, dentals, extensive medical, assistance and grouping of age ranges for the cats) was tracked via Shelter Manager. Cat ages were categorized as "Spring Seniors" (ages 7-10), "Silver Seniors" (ages 11-14) and "Golden Seniors" (ages 15+). Cats were provided a loving foster home while Whiskers worked on finding them a dedicated home to live out their lives, while providing ongoing support for some who may have needed hospice or whose owners financially qualified.

Results:

- Shelter closures during COVID-19 were a factor in not being able to meet the goal of finding 120 cats for the study; 16 cats (19%) were non-municipal pulls
- The most common veterinary care needed was dental, coming in at 71 (68%) of the dataset (included bloodwork, X-rays, antibiotics and pain medications)
- 41 (39%) required more extensive veterinary care (including diagnostics such as fecals, thyroid testing, biopsies, cyst or polyp removals)
- Only 16 (15%) required minor care (e.g., a round of medication)

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- On average, a cat was in foster care for 4-6 months, giving them a chance to recover and feel better before finding a home
- 75 cats (71%) were adopted into loving homes, including those with kidney disease, stomatitis, chronic nasal issues or specific dietary needs; of those, 5 (5%) needed ongoing assistance with medical or food assistance (e.g., prescriptions, diagnostics or prescription diets)
- 5 (5%) needed long-term hospice fosters to live out the remainder of their lives requiring more specialized care Whiskers could provide
- Due to untreatable conditions (e.g, hearth failure, cancers), 14 (13%) were eventually euthanized
- Largest group of adopters were in the age range of 30-45, attributed to social media being the main source of networking for cats
- 8% of adopters were elderly (ages 65+)
- Average cost per cat was \$357

Conclusions: One of the largest barriers to getting senior animals out of the shelter and into loving homes is the medical need associated with bringing them back to health. However, the study's success rate of placing senior cats into loving homes suggests there is a market for adopting them. The Grey Whiskers Senior Cat Program provides a model inclusive of veterinary care support, foster services and finding permanent homes. Associated financial costs may lead to needs for funding assistance to achieve long-term sustainability.

Tags: Senior, cats, foster, fospice, adoption, veterinary care, medical, dental, prescription

Audience: Executive Leadership, Shelter/Rescue Staff & Volunteers, Foster Caregivers, Public, Veterinary Team