

Getting Out There: Meet Your Canine and Feline 'Clients'

Factsheet

You've familiarized yourself with your local resources. You know your target areas. Your car is gassed up, packed with goodies, and ready to go. It's time to get out into the field. Let's go!

Always be friendly when approaching people: Wave, smile, and introduce yourself. Keep smiling even if your efforts meet with a blank stare or apparent hostility. You are here to help!

"Hi, I'm [Name], and I volunteer for community animal birth control services. How are you today? Last year, our area shelter(s) received [number] of unwanted dogs and cats. There are too many animals and not enough homes. And I'm hoping to change that! I work with area clinics and veterinarians to provide free and low-cost spay/neuter services and shots for our community's animals, and this area was one of those on my list as needing help. Do you have any animals? Is this your dog? What do you need help with? May I give your dog a treat? Is she fixed? Do you know anyone on this street who might be looking for some assistance?"

For what to do once you meet Felix or Fido, please refer to "Head to Tail: What to Look, Feel, and Smell for."

Offer a flier or card with your name and the best way to



reach you (you can design your own for little cost at www.streetcards.com and www.designyourowncard.com). Feel free to use our ABC logo! Leave something that will make your visit a pleasant memory for the dogs and their humans: stuffed toys for pooches, a little catnip for felines, and perhaps some educational literature and cookies or mints for the humans.

Take Notes and Stay Organized

Be prepared to write down details on each animal so that you will have all of his or her personal information on file when you make an appointment. Do this as soon as you leave the property so you don't get confused. You will want to record the animal's name, species, age, color, breed, approximate weight (or size, e.g., "Lassie" size, beagle size, etc.), whether spayed or neutered, and living situation (penned, chained, running at large in fenced-in yard, inside/outside, etc.). Get the responsible party's first and last name, address, and telephone number. Always ask for a cell phone number too. If someone tells you that they don't have a phone, ask for a neighbor's or relative's number.

Tip: Create a "case sheet" for each address that you make contact with, and update it after each visit. You'll be surprised at how many "regulars" you'll have under your belt before long, and you'll need an easy and effective system to keep track of them all!

Follow Up, Be Accessible, and Keep Your Promises

Don't make promises you can't keep. If you say you'll call within a week, make sure you do. Your word must be reliable or you'll quickly lose any ground you've gained. Remember: Every spay saves hundreds of animals. You are stemming the flow!

Some ABCs

- Have a working answering machine with a cheerful and informative outgoing message that includes a 24-hour emergency number for the local animal control agency and an emergency veterinary hospital. Return calls within 24 hours.
- Be prepared to be the point of contact at the veterinary or spay/neuter clinic that you use. You may have to be the one to make the appointments, do the reminder calls the night before, get the necessary forms signed, and, if possible, transport the animal(s).
- Call or stop by 24 to 48 hours after surgery to make sure that the animals are bright and alert, that the incision site is clean and healing, and to answer any questions.
- Remember that anything you can do to make this a



good experience for the animals and their human guardians will be passed along to others by word of mouth!

A Second Chance

It is inevitable that you will run across situations where you will be asked to pick up unwanted animals. Don't ever hesitate—an unwanted animal is an animal at risk. Turning any such animal away will likely result in a miserable fate for him or her, such as life at the end of a chain, abandonment, indiscriminate giveaway to a bad home, or even being picked up by a buncher to be sold to a laboratory or to a dogfighter to be used as bait. With you, the animal is safe.

For information on placing a companion animal, please refer to our "Finding the Right Home" brochure and "Animal Shelter Checklist: How Does Your Local Shelter Measure Up?"

You Can't Take Them All Home

It's always tempting, of course, to take animals in yourself, especially when you are already attached and know the heartbreaking details of their story. **Don't give in!** You have the big picture to consider and countless lives to save, so if you tie yourself down with too many animals at home, you will be lost—and so will your lifesaving project. Many good people already do rescue work, and responsible shelters are equipped to place animals. Your project is unique in that it targets the source of the problem. Let someone else deal with adoptions or you will lose your focus. What you'd spend to treat just one homeless dog for heartworms, mange, and hookworms, whipworms, or roundworms could spay at least 10 dogs and save hundreds of thousands of pups from being born into a world where they, too, will suffer from heartworms, mange, and intestinal parasites.

Spaying is cheap. Saving lives is priceless!