

Introduction

Feral cats are often an overlooked group of needy animals. Living in isolated colonies and not socialized to humans, they are not as attractive to help as socialized kittens and cats needing homes. Ferals will likely go their whole lives without a home or without ever allowing themselves to be touched by a human hand. However, they do form their own societies of feral cat colonies, colonies that do require care and attention from animal advocates who provide food, medical care and spay/neuter services. These activities not only help sustain existing colonies; the spay and neuter services ensure these colonies do not continue to produce untold numbers of litters destined to repeat the cycle of homelessness.

Organization Background

Central Texas Feline Rescue is an all-volunteer rescue group that feeds approximately 200 cats a day, 365 days a year. A non-profit 501(c)(3) founded in September 2008, CTFR is comprised of 30 volunteers overseen by a board of three directors. The volunteers trap, transport, feed and seek spay/neuter services for 13 colonies of feral cats in the Austin and Round Rock areas (i).

Central Texas Feline Rescue's philosophy, according to its Web site, is that all feral cats "were once a person's pet or are the descendants of someone's pet, and therefore, are the responsibility of people." (i) For this reason, the group operates on the "TNR" mission adopted by many feline advocates worldwide (ii). This means they Trap, Neuter (or spay) and Release cats in feral colonies and maintain them through feeding and care. Its volunteers are animal advocates routinely involved in attempts to better the lives of cats, including homeless cats socialized to humans. According to the No Kill Advocacy Center, the TNR management program is the only proven and humane method of handling feral cat populations, citing vast numbers of feral lives saved each year through TNR methods and hundreds of thousands in taxpayer dollars saved by taking euthanasia out of the equation (ii).

Central Texas Feline Rescue primarily serves Round Rock, Pflugerville and North Austin, but the organization has trapped cats as far as Thrall, Liberty Hill and South Austin. Volunteers go where needed. The group is made aware of the need to trap, spay/neuter and release feral cats through the help of residents who have noticed a feral cat problem in their communities. Many of the residents who contact CTFR are elderly and low-income, without the means or expertise to trap and fix the feral cat population in their communities. (Personal communication, E. Brumbaugh, Central Texas Feline Rescue Board of Director, Oct. 30, 2010)

According to one Board of Director, Central Texas Feline Rescue traps an average of 300 cats a year and serves 100-150 residents. The group will also trap in areas where they have no point of contact, but where volunteers themselves have noticed a feral cat problem. In these cases, volunteers gain permission to enter private property in order to trap, fix and re-colonize the cats. (Personal communication, E. Brumbaugh, Oct. 30, 2010)

Most of the organization's operating costs - an estimated \$15,000 in 2009 - come from the volunteers' own pockets. Additional funds brought in are raised solely by the occasional fundraising event. As spay and neuter services are provided for free by the local Humane

Society, the group's largest expense is food. The feral cat colonies they serve consume about 1,300 pounds of food each month. The group's volunteers also pay for medical care to any cats, feral or not, they find in need of medical services outside of spaying and neutering. They work to find placement for those socialized cats with medical needs. These efforts make medical care the group's second largest expense. The organization partners with the local Humane Society for its spay/neuter needs, but often must reach out to other rescue groups for felines with special medical needs such as blindness, amputees, feline leukemia, etc. (Personal communication, E. Brumbaugh, Oct. 30, 2010)

The Central Texas Feline Rescue's philosophy is that most ferals are "the descendants of cats once owned by humans, and therefore, the responsibility of humans."(i)

Need

According to several animal advocacy groups, a single unspayed female cat and her offspring can potentially be responsible for producing between 100-700 kittens within seven years (Personal communication, L. Stivers, Austin Humane Society, Nov. 8, 2010). This contributes substantially to overpopulation in feral cat colonies not controlled through spaying and neutering. As feral cats typically do not respond to attempts at domestication, they are unadoptable and frequently euthanized when citizens or animal control officers bring them into shelters. According to the Austin Humane Society, even though euthanization rates were down 36 percent in 2009 from 2008, 32 percent of all animals brought in to local shelters were still euthanized (iii). Ferals, along with strays who have terminal health conditions, ostensibly comprise much of that 32 percent – even with the no-kill policy the City of Austin adopted in early 2010. Because ferals are frequently not adoptable, no-kill policies do not protect them.

In addition to the humane aspect that informs the need for TNR management of ferals, studies show that controlling feral cat populations protects other species. Evidence-based studies conducted around the world have shown ferals can pose significant threat to other species, both wild and domestic (iv, v) and can communicate diseases to other species (vii).

The TNR method, when employed to manage feral cat colonies, has been proven to save money for governing bodies. Using TNR in place of impounding and euthanizing feral cats saved Orange County, Florida, thousands of dollars over a six-year period (vi).

For these reasons, the volunteers of Central Texas Feline Rescue are committed to their Trap, Neuter and Release efforts to control the area's feral cat population. So committed, in fact, that the vast majority of their approximately \$15,000 in annual expenses comes from their own pockets. (Personal communication, E. Brumbaugh, Oct. 30, 2010) They serve and care for feral cat colonies throughout the area 365 days a year. However, the organization's ability to reach out to more ferals, as well as continue to care for the 200 already in the group's program, is compromised by the limited resources of its 30 active members.

Two years of caring for ferals largely through the individual contributions of the group's volunteers has significantly tapped their personal resources. This imperils the level of care the

group currently provides to approximately 200 ferals in Williamson and Travis Counties. As Board of Directors member Elizabeth Brumbaugh communicated, “Money is everything; if we don’t have it we can’t help, we can only dig so deep in our own pockets. Many volunteers and me included are just working stiffs trying to get by.” Brumbaugh added she spent about \$8,000 of her own money in 2009 to help the group continue to work for its stated mission. (Personal communication, E. Brumbaugh, Oct. 30, 2010)

While other animal protection organizations with feral cat programs, such as the local Humane Society, have set budgets fed by fund-raisers, individual donations and grants, the CTFR is a grass-roots organization of 30 people of limited financial means who help animals simply because they care. The group’s fund-raising events are “few and far between” as they require manpower and resources volunteers are unable to provide because they spend most of their time and resources in the field. (Personal communication, E. Brumbaugh, Oct. 30, 2010)

Unlike other regional animal protection groups who have an interest in ferals, CTFR exists solely to handle the feral cat problem in Central Texas. This organization serves the area’s residents by working non-stop to control the feral population – a job that interests both ferals and humans.

CTFR needs resources to fund its existing feral cat programs and to reach out to underserved colonies, which are typically in danger of being trapped and euthanized. Were the organization to receive outside funding, its members could reach out to many more feral cats in many more communities without relying so heavily on their personal resources. They could funnel some funds into educating the public - particularly in heavily bilingual communities and largely elderly communities in which mobility and access to information is limited - about the ability to co-exist with ferals and produce materials to promote awareness of Trap, Neuter and Release methods. Educating residents in those areas would allow CTFR to significantly grow their constituency and develop friendly relationships with members of the community who can identify areas of need and recruit proponents of the TNR method.

As the City of Austin continues to work toward a 90 percent no-kill rate, the need for CTFR’s services will increase. The volunteers, unable to spend what they have in previous years, will be unable to keep up with the demand unless funding is obtained.

Goals

Central Texas Feline Rescue’s goal is to control the area’s existing feral population, reduce the number of ferals subjected to inhumane euthanization, and heighten public awareness about the need to treat ferals humanely.

Objectives

Central Texas Feline Rescue strives to ensure feral access to spay and neuter services. It plans to hold regular spay-neuter clinics with partner advocacy group, Austin Humane Society, instead of the program’s current “as-needed” partnership.

A secondary but no less important objective is to accommodate the vast dietary needs of area

feral colonies the group already serves as well as those colonies the group will adopt if funding needs are met. The group's volunteers continue to access care for other animals in need. For example, volunteers help adoptable homeless cats with health issues.

A final objective of CTFR is to launch awareness campaigns (literature, PSAs, etc.) and work with other interested groups, such as Austin No Kill Coalition, SPCA, The Humane Society and Alley Cat Allies.

Objective One

Expand TNR services to at least a dozen new feral colonies within the first six months of 2011, while continuing to provide daily feeding and monitoring of the existing 200 cats in colonies the group already serves. In order to adequately control the population of feral cats in Austin, Central Texas Feline Rescue will continue to employ the TNR methods it has successfully used throughout the last two years with the help of the Austin Humane Society. The group has confidence in this method as it is advocated and used by advocacy groups from the local Humane Society to the Global Spay Neuter Campaign.

Methods

CTFR will hire a contract accountant to create a budget for existing 200 colonies and project what resources are necessary to reach out to even more colonies and ferals. The current active members, together with the board and accountant, will summarize their current expenses and calculate how much money the individual members are spending to serve the existing feral colonies. They will factor that into the budget and create a timeline of food purchases using the group's funds. The current Board of Directors and its approximately 30 active volunteers will familiarize themselves with the budget and its parameters; the Board of Directors will be responsible for making sure the group's budget is adhered to while carrying out its daily activities and reaching out to two new colonies a month. The Board and accountant will ensure that the group's existing food needs are met with the budget outlined and work from there to plan/budget for spay/neuter clinics and find and care for other ferals.

To track the areas served and identify areas of need, the group will create an interactive digital map upon which volunteers can pinpoint areas they serve daily, weekly, or monthly. This map will show current colonies in Round Rock, North Austin, Pflugerville, Thrall, Liberty Hill and a few colonies the group serves in Central and South Austin, all denoted by numbers. By contrast, this same map will aid volunteers in identifying areas of need. The map will be accompanied by a fluid legend that explains the number of cats served at each colony, a point of contact (if provided) for each colony, and areas of need will be explained in terms of observations of feral activity. Each change to these interactive files will be tracked by the system in which it was created, preferably a Web-based program such as a Wiki, blog space or Google Documents, all of which are free to registered users. By the end of six and twelve months, CTFR will be able to provide documentation of sustained service to ferals and expansion to additional colonies.

Food purchases will move from an as-needed purchase made by any volunteer to become the responsibility of only members of the board or a committee of volunteers dedicated to the

purchase and dissemination of food. Currently, CTFR purchases food from area businesses when discounts are available in quantities as little as one bag to as large as a ton. However, bulk food purchases can be made at regularly scheduled intervals (to be determined by the board of directors or food committee based on both projected and actual growth) for a 15 percent discount through Internet retailers such as Pet Food Direct, saving the group at least \$5,000 annually.

Volunteers will continue to use their own personal vehicles to feed colonies and transport cats to receive spay, neuter and vaccination services. Volunteers will continue to store food at their own personal homes, or the group will set up centralized food storage units on the personal property of volunteers with space they can donate to the charity. Those storage sites should act as central feeding stations, ideally in proximity to nearby colonies, and food will be measured, recorded and checked out to feeders.

Objective Two

Launch awareness campaigns (literature, PSAs, e-mail marketing, etc.) and work with other interested groups such as Austin No Kill Coalition, SPCA, The Humane Society and Alley Cat Allies.

Methods

The group's volunteers will rely on its members' talents to produce awareness materials about ferals and print/distribute them among the public. Talents include, for example, the professional background of experienced graphic designer Ruthann Panipinto, who has a history of creating publications for animal advocacy groups and has worked professionally at several newspapers. This effort would provide outreach to communities in which ferals have previously been trapped and brought to euthanizing facilities.

Providing outreach aligns with the group's objective to educate the public about the alternatives to euthanization, and members will focus on areas in which awareness about TNR methods may be limited. This is particularly necessary in the underserved communities in which pets are commonly not spayed or neutered, frequently abandoned, and feral colonies are formed from a few abandoned pets.

CTFR volunteers will petition local media outlets to carry messages about its mission and/or fund-raising events as an in-kind donation to the charity. Using one member's Web design skills, the group will focus some of its funding on marketing campaigns such as e-mail blasts and e-mail campaigning to build up a constituency and garner future donations.

Evaluation

Our volunteers and Board of Directors will seek to determine if the organization's competency grows, to evaluate how much awareness is raised in area communities and if we're continuing to meet our original objective to reach out to more feral cats and colonies.

Specific to the colonies for which the group continues to care, our volunteers will formally track

the number of ferals that have been captured and fixed. They will use the same tracking to formally document new colonies and numbers of ferals fixed every month. These numbers will be captured and saved in an Excel spreadsheet or in a database developed by members. This data will be compared to the number of animals helped during the organization's formative years between 2008-2010. Our Board of Directors, with the help of volunteers, will conduct the evaluations, the results of which will be shared with the communities we serve, other advocacy groups, all our volunteers and any sources of funding.

We propose to use "The Effects of Implementing a Feral Cat Spay/Neuter Program in a Florida County Animal Control Service" (vi) as a model for tracking the merits of CTFR's TNR management program. This particular model tracked a six-year period of feral cat management both before and after implementation of TNR methods. During this time period, the percent of impounded cats euthanized decreased, complaints from residents decreased, and the number of cats euthanized decreased while the ratio of surgeries to impounds increased. CTFR aims to show the same measurements of success in its own annual reports while relying on hard data from studies such as that from the aforementioned study to reinforce the universal success of TNR programs.

Simply put, we will consider an increase in the number of ferals helped as one measure of success for the group, as well as positive feedback from communities that see a reduction in the number of ferals in neighborhoods. We will also determine success based on the current health and well-being of the colonies we oversee.

Sustainability

The Central Texas Feline Rescue Group has squeaked by for two years on the contributions of its volunteers. A core group of volunteers has committed much of their personal resources to protect and care for feral cat populations in Central Texas. A very small portion of the group's funds come from an occasional fund-raising event. The board and volunteers believe strongly in the group's work, and are committed to using some of the group's resources to better promote and organize fund-raising events. Central Texas Feline Rescue intends to continue its work for as long as necessary. The group's work will not end until all feral cats in Central Texas have a chance to be neutered or spayed, therefore reducing the number of ferals unattended in our communities. CTFR needs equipment, food and funds for spay and neuter services.

As the national economy continues to decline, more and more residents abandon their animals and litters; the number of feral cats will likely only grow in the foreseeable future based on this observation. We are looking, as a group, to other animal advocacy groups for potential funding, as well as possibly appealing to local city and county governments to help fund the work we do in their communities, therefore reducing the burden on their animal welfare groups.

Budget

Salaries

Accountant

(two hours a month for six months,

at an estimated \$200/hour).....**\$2,400**

Miscellaneous professional services
(graphics designer, Web master, program manager,
event coordinators).....volunteer

Awareness Materials

Signage to promote fund-raising events
(twice per six-month time period, at an estimated
\$30 per printed sign and 10 signs for each event).....\$600 (viii)

Limited-color brochures to place at area businesses
and use at CTFR events to promote awareness
(pack of 500 to last for first six months to one year).....\$40 (viii)

Subscription to online marketing site (per six months for e-mail
campaign).....\$150
Advertisements in print media.....in-kind
Spots on TV / Radio channels.....in-kind

Computers to produce materials.....in-kind

Animal Care

Food (1,300 lbs. a month for existing 13 colonies,
200 cats + 100 lbs. each for six-12 new colonies
added in first six months of 2011).....\$35,000
subtracting 15% off on bulk orders (available at petfooddirect.com).....\$29,750

Vaccination Services (as needed, cost here is
per case and average of various vaccination costs).....\$35

Spay/Neuter services.....in-kind

Cat cages (for trap & transport):
Cabin Kennel with wire top crate, 12x\$20.17).....\$242.04

Twist and Go Pet Carrier (25x\$14.63).....\$365.75

Travel

(based on IRS's 2010 Standard Mileage Rates
for charitable organizations - \$.14/mile for a year)
Feeding Travel (15 miles/week for 20 volunteers).....\$2,184
Trapping Travel (50 miles/week for 5 volunteers).....\$1,820

Facilities

Food storage.....in-kind

Grand Total.....\$37,586.79

Summary

Central Texas Feline Rescue was formed to protect the lives of feral cats, a subset of homeless cats often overlooked by the public because they are “unadoptable.” Its stated purpose – to help manage the feral cat population through Trap, Neuter and Release methods - is carried out day in and day out by a dedicated group of volunteers who have tapped significant amounts of personal resources in order to continue their work on behalf of cats that might otherwise be trapped by animal control groups and euthanized in great numbers.

In the two years the 501(c)(3) has existed, its volunteers have provided spay, neuter, vaccination and food services to 200 ferals in 13 colonies throughout Central Texas. The 200 cats in these colonies see a Central Texas Feline Rescue volunteer daily or weekly to provide food and health services. The volunteers are aware, however, of the growing need for feral cat protection as declining economy forces residents from homes, abandonment of pets, and a decline in pet owners’ fulfillment of their responsibility to spay, neuter and vaccinate their animals. Those factors combined will contribute to a growing number of free-roaming cats that will never be socialized to human companionship, and therefore, deem them incapable of domestication. The Central Texas Feline Rescue’s objectives to reach out to at least two new colonies per month will ensure an increase of nearly 100 percent the number of cats or colonies served by the group, as well as nearly doubling the number of residents served. Increasing our visibility in these communities, as well as increasing general visibility and awareness through educational materials and marketing campaigns, will ensure an increase in dedication among the public and knowledge of alternatives to euthanization.

We believe the objectives detailed in this proposal will only heighten our ability to help a group of animals that are typically defenseless to trapping and euthanizing. We expect an increase in the number of feral cat colonies to which we reach and a heightened public awareness due to our efforts. We anticipate the ability to maintain the quality of care we provide to the existing 13 colonies and 200 feral cats, while reaching out to many more in danger of losing the fight against euthanasia.

The cost of our projected needs for 2011 totals \$37,586.79. With the exception of a contract accountant hired to implement our budget, all manpower is donated by volunteers, as is much of the talent for our marketing campaigns and facility storage. We are a nimble and young non-profit with low overhead. Your investment of \$30,000 will assure the feeding and health care of existing and newly adopted feral cats and colonies, and we are excited about the potential partnership between us. Thank you for your consideration of our request for funding.

References

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