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**Spring Spay Challenge Faces Challenges During COVID-19 Pandemic**

*Time frame for veterinarians to save cats’ lives by providing spay & neuter services for free-roaming cats due to crisis is extended*

Mt. Rainier, MD (May 8, 2020) – UPDATED: Due to the unprecedented shutdown of many spay/neuter clinics because of the COVID-19 pandemic, ACR is extending its SSC project until the end of October 2020. Unfortunately, as a result of this shutdown, ACR is expecting the number of feral cats and colonies to grow, especially due to the impending kitten season. Therefore, it is of the utmost importance that when clinics reopen that vets come forward to help TNR feral cats and curb the number of kittens being born on the streets. Unsterilized cats are suffering during this pandemic as well, and over 50% of kittens born on the streets get sick and die. This is why it is more important now than ever that vets step up and help mitigate this crisis as much and as soon as possible.

Earlier this spring, Alley Cat Rescue announced the launch of the Spring Spay Challenge, an annual event that brings veterinarians and communities together to save cats’ lives. The group is asking veterinarians to get involved with trap-neuter-return (TNR) by pledging to provide low-cost or free spay/neuter and rabies vaccination to free-roaming cats from March until October 2020. Now in its tenth year, nearly 80,000 cats have been spayed or neutered by 1,400 participants as part of the season-long Challenge.

It’s estimated that 860,000 cats are euthanized in U.S. shelters every year, many of whom are newborn kittens or unsocialized free-roaming cats. The two go hand in hand, as 80% of kittens entering shelters each year are born to these unsterilized outdoor cats. Both groups often require a significant investment of time and limited shelter resources before they’re adoptable. The influx of kittens during the spring and summer months, also known as Kitten Season, stretches shelters to the breaking point, leading to euthanasia of healthy cats and kittens simply to make room for each day’s new arrivals.

“It is a tragedy that 2,500 cats and kittens are killed every day in our shelters, places that are supposed to serve as a temporary sanctuary and refuge for cats in need,” said Louise Holton, Alley Cat Rescue president and founder. “The best way to reduce the number of kittens flooding into shelters is by spaying and neutering outdoor, free-roaming cats. When the breeding cycle is stopped, unwanted kittens are never born, and the adult cat receives health benefits too.”

Targeted TNR programs have been shown to significantly reduce shelter intake and euthanasia rates. Alley Cat Rescue’s Cheap Fix program, which offers low-cost or free spay/neuter services to targeted zip codes in Maryland, led to a 22% reduction in cat intake and 18% reduction in cat euthanasia from those zip codes at the Prince George’s County Animal Shelter in 2017.

“Veterinarians are the key to ending the unnecessary killing in our nation’s shelters. A kitten should never be euthanized over a lack of space and a cat should never be killed simply because she isn’t comfortable with people,” Holton added.

To participate, vets sign-up at <http://www.saveacat.org/spring-spay-challenge.html> and pledge to provide free or low-cost spay/neuter services to at least two free-roaming cats for each week from March through October. “The Spring Spay Challenge is a great entry point for veterinarians looking to gain experience with free-roaming cats and TNR,” said ACR Operations Manager Denise Hilton. “Vets are free to decide how they meet the goal of two cats per week and our hope is that veterinarians will use the experience they gain during the Challenge to determine how to best integrate low-cost spay/neuter services into their everyday practice all year long. It’s a great way to meet new clients too,” Hilton said.

About Alley Cat Rescue, Inc.:

ACR is a national 501c(3) nonprofit organization dedicated to the welfare of all cats; stray, abandoned, feral and wild. ACR advocates for humane, nonlethal management of feral cats through the process of trap-neuter-return (TNR). ACR has been awarded the Independent Charities of America’s “Best in America” Seal of Approval, and their newsletter has won several awards from the Cat Writers’ Association. For more information, visit www.SaveACat.org.