The Community Benefits of Feral Cats

Community cats gained their name because they are part of, and beneficial to, the local communities in which they live. These cats help improve the health of individuals and the public as a whole. When a TNR program is implemented, community cats and humans can coexist peacefully.

Benefits to the Individual

- ***Increases human mental and physical health:*** Studies show that caring for cats can improve people's mental and physical health. A study at the University of Minnesota showed a 30 to 40% less risk of cardiovascular disease, including stroke, in those who lived with a cat (Quershi et al., 2009). Other studies have found health benefits such as reduced risk of heart attack, cardiovascular diseases, sleeping disorders, and lower blood pressure and anxiety (Arhant-Sudhir et al., 2011; Friedmann et al., 2010; Heady, 1999; Jennings, 1997; Levine et al. 2013; Qureshi et al., 2009).
- ***Increases compassion and a sense of purpose*****:** Often cat caretakers are elderly men and women, a population at risk for depression, loneliness, and isolation. Cats relieve these conditions and often bring a sense of happiness, compassion, and purpose to people who care for them. Just as companion animals have been shown to extend life expectancies and relieve stress (Qureshi et al., 2009; Levine et al., 2013), caring for feral cats can improve the health and happiness of the caretaker.

Benefits to the Community

- ***Controls rodent populations*****:** Cats keep rodent populations in check and discourage new rodents from moving into the area. Rats are known to carry diseases, many of which can be spread to humans such as leptospirosis, murine typhus, and salmonellosis (CDC, 2017). Rat populations are steadily growing due to climate change and increased urbanization (Christensen, 2016).
- ***Pesticide-free solution to rodent control*****:** Cities such as Chicago, Washington, D.C., and Baltimore are utilizing community cats for a chemical- and pesticide-free solution to rat infestations by adopting out "working cats" to businesses such as restaurants, where cleanliness is very important for public health (Christensen, 2016).
- ***Reduces the spread of fleas*****:** Community cats are treated for fleas by their caretakers who can give flea treatment directly to the cats or to their sleeping areas.

- ***Controls the spread of rabies*:** Cats are given a 3-year rabies vaccine at the time of spay/neuter surgery. Community cats have excellent immune responses when vaccinated and can stay protected for over four years after the first vaccination (Fischer et al., 2007). Many caregivers also keep detailed documentation on their community cats and will take the cat to receive a booster shot when it is needed. Additionally, the spread of rabies from cats to humans is very rare. The CDC reports that cats are much less susceptible to rabies than other animals such as raccoons and bats (Levy, 2004). Cats vaccinated against rabies create a buffer zone between wildlife and the public, which greatly reduces the risk of contracting the disease.
- ***Prevents other cats from moving into area*:** Since cats are territorial, an established, stable, sterilized, and vaccinated colony of feral cats will deter other stray and feral cats from moving into the area. This decreases the risk that residents will encounter an unvaccinated cat, and will virtually eliminate problem behaviors like fighting, spraying, and yowling.
- ***Creates community activities*:** Implementing local TNR programs helps drive community involvement and encourages compassionate action. TNR also creates opportunities for outreach, education, and cooperation. Today's society has a heightened awareness of the staggering euthanasia rates occurring in animal shelters, and there is more determination than ever to reduce the killing of healthy animals.
- ***Saves tax dollars*:** Unlike eradication programs, which are paid for using tax dollars, most TNR programs operate using private money and volunteers. A study found that TNR programs can cut costs in half. With an estimated 87 million free-roaming, community cats in the United States, it would cost government entities about $16 billion to trap and kill these cats as opposed to about $9 billion to support TNR programs run by rescue organizations and individual volunteers (Best Friends Animal Society, 2010).

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