



Introduction to starting a spay/neuter program

*“Each year millions of healthy dogs, cats, puppies, and kittens continue to die in the United States because they are homeless. It doesn’t matter if their deaths are “painless” – what matters is their deaths are **pointless**, as long as litters of surplus kittens and puppies continue to be born. Our shelters burst with discarded pets who wait, literally at death’s door. Our highways are dotted with the bodies of dogs and cats who’ve been pushed from moving cars. Almost as fast as we dispose of them, new ones take their place.*

“Animals who haven’t even been conceived today will die next year, unless someone works now to prevent them from being born. Creative, new efforts must be made to attack the problem at its root. Affordable sterilization, continuous education, and breeding legislation must be imposed if this annual holocaust is to ever end.”

– Gail Parmer, The Spayed Club

Gail Parmer and Erika Seybert co-founded The Spayed Club in 1990. Since then, they have raised and spent hundreds of thousands of dollars to spay or neuter over fifteen thousand dogs and cats. Surgery costs were paid for by pet owners through The Spayed Club’s low-cost program, or completely by the Spayed Club (subsidized). If you are thinking about starting a similar program in your area, The Spayed Club is a great model to learn from. The following information is based on their example, with some thoughts and ideas from other programs we have come across.

The first thing you need to do is assess the needs of your community. What are your community’s current euthanasia rates? Are there any other low-cost programs or clinics in the area? How are they doing? Is the general public aware of the need for a spay/neuter program? Are local veterinarians sympathetic to the need for a low-cost program?

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neuter program

To become fully aware of the issues, Gail recommends volunteering time in all aspects of the work at your local shelter. *“Go to the euthanasia room. Watch tail-wagging dogs and purring cats die – then tell others what it is like. If you are saddened by this tragedy, start now to prevent tomorrow’s homeless pets from being born.”*



It may be stating the obvious, but begin by neutering your own pets before they reproduce. Your own example will go a long way in convincing others to do the same.

Take every opportunity to talk to new pet owners about neutering their pets before they have litters. Often people who buy a purebred cat or dog feel that it is mandatory to breed that animal. Tell them how many pure breeds (not just mutts) end up in pounds and shelters. Have information on hand to address owners’ concerns, such as: “If I get her spayed, she’ll get fat and lazy.” “We want her to have one litter, it’ll make her a better dog/cat.” “I want him to have some fun before he is neutered.”

These, and other old wives’ tales, may stand in your way. Some people don’t understand the issue until they are faced with a problem themselves, such as being unable to “give away” litters of puppies or kittens, listening to a howling cat in heat, or having male dogs outside the front door or jumping into their yard when their female dog is in heat. No matter how people arrive at the spay/neuter solution, having a program in place assures that the animal will be neutered or spayed.

Are you ready? To start and run a spay/neuter program is a lot of work, but it is worth it. Your efforts can prevent hundreds, even thousands of pointless animal deaths.

Non-profit Status

Consult with an attorney familiar with the non-profit status to see whether this is the direction you want to go. Review the pros and cons with the attorney. Some organizations, such as United Humanitarians of Philadelphia, offer an umbrella non-profit status to groups starting a spay/neuter program. Having some form of non-profit identification helps to lend legitimacy to your operation. Donors will be able to write off their contributions against their taxes, and the public will take you seriously. We feel it is worth the initial cost and effort to obtain this recognition.



“ The Humane Society of the United States estimates that eight to twelve million animals enter a shelter each year. The American Humane Association estimates that 25% to 30% of animals are adopted from shelters, and that 4% of cats and up to 14% of dogs are returned to their owners. 30% to 60% – depending on geographic region – of animals brought into shelters are euthanized. ”

Veterinarians

Do not expect that every veterinarian will greet your plan for a low-cost spay/neuter program with great enthusiasm! Keep in mind that a great many veterinarians are simply business people with their eyes on the bottom line. The words “low-cost” may be a threat to them; they may fear you will be taking away their business. The Spayed Club suggests approaching vets who are already involved with low-cost programs or who have reputations for giving price breaks to needy people.



Once you have found one or more veterinarians willing to work with you, determine what fees they will accept for spay/neuter surgery. They need to cover their costs and these vary from area to area, depending upon the size and location of the clinic and how many employees they have. If you are working with several different vets their prices may vary.

Decide if you want to offer a subsidy from your group. For example, the vets may require \$50 to \$60 per surgery to

cover their basic costs, a reasonable low-cost price. This could already be half their usual price for their regular clients, but still too high for some people in your area. Will your group contribute \$10-\$15 or more to each surgery? Do you want to fully subsidize some needier people? The Spayed Club, for example, offers low-cost, partial-subsidy and full subsidy depending on individual circumstances.

From the outset, you will need to determine how your program will handle more complicated procedures, such as for feral, pregnant, in heat, or cryptorchid (only one testicle has dropped) animals. Your vets may wish to charge extra for these surgeries. However, some vets will treat feral cats at a reduced cost, especially if their caretakers do all the handling. These situations need to be addressed with both the vets and your clients.

Most low-cost programs will not subsidize declawing a cat, and we recommend that you do not. However, many programs do offer reduced cost vaccinations. This is up to you and your vet. The Spayed Club discourages vets from imposing other services as part of the spay/neuter surgery. They have found that vets who insist on adding services (not subsidized by their



“ The spaying of one female cat can mean the prevention of 29 litters over a period of ten years. No one can guess how many litters can be prevented by the neutering of a male. We have heard it said by knowledgeable people in the field that a male cat on the loose can sire as many as 2,500 kittens in a year and a male dog nearly as many puppies. ”

- United Humanitarians

program) are not used as much as those who don't. A client can make their own arrangements for other procedures at the vets' normal fees.

Will you differentiate between purchased, stray, adopted and inherited pets? The Spayed Club usually charges more for purchased purebreds. Other programs only offer services to people receiving some kind of public assistance. Some don't differentiate at all. Determine what will suit your community.



Once all these points have been established with the vet(s) you will be working with, you will be ready to organize these resources. The Spayed Club uses two lists: one for internal use that lists the full details of the agreement with each vet (prices, restrictions, extra fees, etc); and another for the public containing the names and locations of participating vets.

Clients

Now that you have a system to access the veterinarians in place, it is time to seek out clients.

Posters, public service announcements, advertisements, getting an article written about your work in the local newspaper or even getting a story on TV or cable, and of course, word of mouth, are all effective means to attract clients, especially in combination. You can call "free to good home" ads and offer to help spay mothers of litters. Take referrals from veterinarians, animal shelters and local animal control officers.

If you have a well organized program you will not lack for clients. As word gets out, you will soon be very busy. Establish either a 24-hour phone message machine (get a good quality answering machine, and test it out for sound clarity), or have a volunteer answering the phone during advertised hours, or a combination of both. Return calls promptly. If your message asks for a mailing address, mail out your applications promptly. These details are critical for building a professional public image. (See appendix for a sample application form.)



“ The average fertile dog can produce two litters in a year. The average number of puppies per litter is six to ten. A fertile dog and her offspring can produce 67,000 dogs in only six years. A fertile dog has her first litter when she is five to eighteen months old – some larger breeds mature later. ”



Review the applications to determine the pet owner needs and eligibility for low-cost neutering, or partial to full subsidy. The Spayed Club factors the applicant's financial status, number of pets, and where their animals came from into their decisions. Because low-cost rates are generally about half the vets standard fees, the vets in your program will require some financial assessment of applicants so that the service is not being offered to people who can easily afford their regular fees.

Each client is issued a standard certificate for presentation to the vet, specifying pet caretaker information, vet informa-

tion and amount due vet for spay/neuter surgery. (See appendix for a sample certificate.) At the time of surgery, the vet keeps the top copy and the bottom copy is sent to your organization for its records.

Paperwork

The program we have been describing requires a lot of paperwork – forms, lists, certificates etc. It is a good idea to invest in some good design at the outset, as these documents will be out there for some time representing your organization. Many printing companies have designers who can help you. Or, you may recruit someone with desktop publishing experience to produce your forms and brochures. The examples in the appendix are based on The Spayed Club's very effective designs.

It is important to create a distinctive name and logo for your program. This will be your identifying "signature" on your flyers, brochures, store displays, stationery, and business cards.

Your literature should include detailed information on cat and dog overpopulation as it impacts your community. Know your local animal control agencies' admission, adoption, and euthanasia figures and track them from year to year. Publish the results.

Rescue

Some organizations combine spay/neuter with a rescue and adoption program. This is a matter of choice and availability of resources. Gail Parmer of The Spayed Club does not recommend spreading yourself too thin. "It's



“ The average number of litters a fertile cat can produce is three a year. The average number of kittens in a litter is four to six. The number of animals one fertile cat and her offspring can produce in seven years is 420,000. The average age of a cat having her first litter is ten months. Puberty can occur anywhere from four to twelve months. ”

natural that you may be tempted to rescue existing homeless animals, which can be time-consuming, heartbreaking, and costly. Since funds will be limited, investing them to achieve the greatest results makes sense. With the amount of money you might spend to rescue one animal, you could typically spay two or three (or more), preventing two or three entire litters from being born. Reducing the flood of unwanted animals is best done not by finding homes for a relative few, but by stopping surplus animals from being born in the first place.”



We suggest that you discuss all the options fully with your core membership. Each community is unique, and what works for one will not work for another. Urban problems are very different from rural ones. Local economies vary across the country, and a fee scale that is affordable for one is too high for another. Because you live and work in your community, you know what will work for you.

Other Options

If a spay/neuter program like the one we have described seems too ambitious, then another area you may like to get involved with is legislation. The Fund for Animals, at 965 Alamo Drive, Suite 306, Vacaville, California 95687, is a great force in this area. They have assisted many communities in establishing legislation for spay/neuter policies. They publish an informative bulletin about what people have done around the country. For example, The State Legislative Humane Coalition of Connecticut succeeded in getting an Animal License Plate law passed in June 1997. Funds from the sale of the plates go towards low cost sterilization services operated by the State Department of Agriculture. The plates cost \$50 above the regular fee. The DMV retains \$15 for their administrative costs. The renewal costs \$15, of which \$5 will be kept by the DMV.

Other states also have license plate laws which bring much needed funds to spay/neuter programs. Contact The Fund for Animals for further information on starting a pet license plate program in your state.



“ The establishment of low-cost mass spaying programs in the major population centers of the country can greatly reduce the surplus and thus prevent an incalculable amount of cruelty.

That is what this is all about. ”

- United Humanitarians



LOW-COST SPAY/NEUTER PROGRAM APPLICATION

[Your Group Name] works with a network of veterinarians who have reduced their regular prices for those who cannot otherwise afford to have their pets or strays spayed or neutered. This Program has been created for pet owners and caretakers with genuine financial need. You must supply all of the information requested on this form to receive a spay/neuter discount certificate.

Our participating veterinarians rely on us to pre-qualify applicants, and their trust in us and the applicants' truthfulness is vital to this Program. When the pet owner's need is great, [Your Group Name] may pay the veterinarian all or some of the cost on behalf of the pet owner. *The donations used to make these payments are obtained by the constant hard work of our non-paid volunteers. Please return our generosity to you and your pets by volunteering or by donating money when your financial situation changes.*

**YOUR
GROUP'S
NAME
HERE**

Instructions: Start with appropriate section below. When you have completed the application, please mail it to [Your Group Name] at [Your Address] _____. **Include a self-addressed, stamped envelope.** If you are able to afford the low-cost spay/neuter prices, a response will be mailed to you within five business days after we receive your application. The price is paid directly by you to the veterinarian. If you require financial assistance, **your request will be processed as funds are available.** You are responsible for the cost of any vaccination, tests, or other procedures you request from the vet. Cats may not be declawed in conjunction with this Program.

How did you hear about [Your Group Name]? _____

PART 1 – THE ANIMAL(S)

*Please fill out **DOG** or **CAT** (for pets or single strays) or **STRAY CAT COLONY** section.*

DOG	CAT
Breed: _____ Sex: <input type="checkbox"/> Male <input type="checkbox"/> Female <input type="checkbox"/> Unknown Approximate Weight: _____ <i>(must provide)</i> Age of Animal: _____ <i>(specify years or months)</i>	Sex: <input type="checkbox"/> Male <input type="checkbox"/> Female <input type="checkbox"/> Unknown Age of Animal: _____ <i>(specify years or months)</i> If female, has she had a litter? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Don't Know <i>Note: Cats MUST be brought to vet in a carrier.</i>

Source of Animal: Bought, Price \$ _____ Found Adopted Inherited
(check one)

From: Pet Shop Shelter Relative Breeder
(check one) Acquaintance Stray Other _____

Condition of Animal: Appears Healthy Wound/Injury *(Describe)* _____
(check all that apply) Runny Eyes/Nose In Heat Pregnant Fleas
 Friendly Bites/Scratches Feral (wild)
 Other Health Problems? _____

STRAY CAT COLONY

Describe the situation: _____

Geographic location of colony: _____

Number of unspayed females *(specify ages, if known)*: _____

Do you regularly feed these cats? Yes No If Yes, how often? _____

The cats are: Friendly Semi-Wild Wild Can they be petted? Yes No

Do you have a cat carrier? Yes No *Please borrow one!* Do you have a humane trap? Yes No

Do you know how to use a humane trap? Yes No Do you need one? Yes No

Please fill out additional information on the reverse side.

PART II – PERSONAL AND FINANCIAL INFORMATION

The information requested in this section will help us evaluate your request for low-cost services to our participating veterinarians. Please print clearly.

Name _____ Phone Number () _____ day
 Address _____ () _____ evening
 City/ST _____ Zip _____ County _____

What is the name of your current veterinarian? _____

Have you checked with your vet for a price quote on this surgery? Yes, Price \$ _____ No

Can you afford the low-cost prices? Yes No

If *Yes*, skip the box below. If *No*, please answer the questions in the box below. If this animal hasn't had a rabies shot, please figure an additional \$5-12 into your total expense.

LOW-COST PRICE RANGE		
	Female Spay	Male Neuter
Cat	\$35-50	\$25-\$40
Dog	\$50-110	\$40-\$100
<i>(Dog prices are often based on weight.)</i>		

Many people are able to afford the full low-cost price if they can pay part of the cost at the time of surgery and have a payment plan for the rest of the amount.

Can you afford a plan like this? Yes No

(for each animal)

How much can you afford to pay at the time of surgery? \$ _____
 How much per month? \$ _____

No How much can you afford to pay on the day of surgery? \$ _____
 How much in the future? \$ _____ When? _____

Please describe your financial situation, checking all applicable boxes:

- | | | | |
|---|---|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Own home | <input type="checkbox"/> Rent | <input type="checkbox"/> Single income | <input type="checkbox"/> Double income |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Retired | <input type="checkbox"/> Food stamps | <input type="checkbox"/> Medicaid | <input type="checkbox"/> Public assistance |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Unemployment compensation | <input type="checkbox"/> Aid to families with dependent children | | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Supplemental security income | <input type="checkbox"/> Pharmaceutical assistance to aged and disabled | | |

Describe your situation: _____

I hereby certify that the foregoing information is true and correct and that I have not omitted anything which would make my application false or misleading.

Your Signature _____ Date _____

From the enclosed list, please identify the vets most convenient to you (*Please note: some vets are "CATS ONLY"*):

Vet Preference: 1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____

It is the law that animals be inoculated against rabies. Does the animal need a rabies shot? Yes No

PLEASE REMEMBER TO INCLUDE A SELF-ADDRESSED, STAMPED BUSINESS ENVELOPE.

Volunteer Comments: _____

Call Returned? Yes No Not applicable

**YOUR
GROUP'S
Logo
HERE**

**YOUR
GROUP'S
NAME
HERE**

*A non-profit,
all-volunteer
organization
providing
a low-cost
dog and cat
spay/neuter
program.*

LOW-COST SPAY/NEUTER CERTIFICATE

Valid only for services listed below through [Your Group Name] and participating veterinarians • VOID IF PHOTOCOPIED

Issue Date _____	Certificate # _____	Expiration Date _____	Authorization Signature _____
Pet Owner _____	Veterinarian _____		_____
Address _____	_____	Clinic _____	_____
_____	_____	Address _____	_____
Phone _____	_____	Phone _____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____

Pet Owner: Specify you have a certificate when making vet appointment and bring certificate with you. **Pay indicated amount directly to the vet at time of surgery.** Indicated amount is for basic spay/neuter and rabies services only and may not reflect total vet service charges. Neither this Program nor the vet is liable for any possible health complications arising from the surgery due to pre-existing health problems of the pet. **This certificate is void if the bearer requests declawing for a cat.** Cats must be transported in a carrier.

ANIMAL (one per certificate)	VETERINARY SERVICES	Pet owner pays \$	
TYPE: <input type="checkbox"/> Dog <input type="checkbox"/> Cat	<input type="checkbox"/> Spay <input type="checkbox"/> Neuter \$	<input type="checkbox"/> Rabies \$	Total \$
GENDER: <input type="checkbox"/> F <input type="checkbox"/> M <input type="checkbox"/> Unknown	We thank our network of veterinarians who lower their prices to make our program possible.		
Special Instructions: _____			

Veterinarian's Signature: _____ **Surgery Date:** _____
 This signature confirms that the surgery was performed on the above date. (Vet's office: Please call if there are any questions regarding this certificate or the validity of the authorization signature listed above. After surgery, please return the completed certificate to [Your Group Name].)

ALTERED PETS WILL LIKELY BE HAPPIER, HEALTHIER & WILL NOT CONTRIBUTE TO PET OVERPOPULATION!

Your Group Name • Your Street Address • Your City, State, Zip Code • Your Phone Number



2001: No More Homeless Pets

2001: No More Homeless Pets is a program of Best Friends Animal Sanctuary, the nation's largest sanctuary for abused and abandoned animals.

Working together with other shelters, sanctuaries, and animal welfare groups, Best Friends is helping to bring about a time when there are no more homeless animals, and when every dog or cat who's ever born can be guaranteed a good home with a loving family.

Best Friends is supported primarily by donations. Contributions are tax-deductible. Thank you for caring.

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