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Neighbor Relations

Jesse Oldham
Senior Admin. Director, Community Outreach
December 10th, 2008



or...

**“Talking to People Who Could
Care Less About TNR
...About TNR”**

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This workshop will:

- Briefly **review** what we teach in the Neighborhood Cats TNR certification workshop
- Share my **lessons learned** through doing TNR outreach for 4 years with Slope Street Cats and other groups
- Give us an opportunity to hear **your lessons learned**



Since we're all at different levels of experience with TNR – some of us have taken the workshop, some haven't – we're going to review the basics and then move on to some problem-solving and sharing of solutions and ideas.

No Magic Wand...



...sorry!

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Ideally the cats would live on our property and no one else's but in NYC that is simply not the case with the landscape we have. Things are going to keep changing and we are just going to have to keep up with it. Feral cat community is not immune to the saying - "The only thing constant is change". Sometimes communication with virtual strangers about a topic we care deeply about is not easy.

Different Solutions for Different Problems



Any others?

Some situations where we might have to talk to our neighbors about TNR:

1. Starting a TNR project or hosting a community meeting
2. Nuisance complaints about cats' waste, noise or feeding stations
3. Threats to the cats
4. Threats to our ability to manage a colony (reporting us, etc.)
5. Finding a new feeding station spot or a new winter shelter spot

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There might be any number of reasons you have to talk to your neighbors about TNR (1-5, any more?). You might approach each of these in a different way

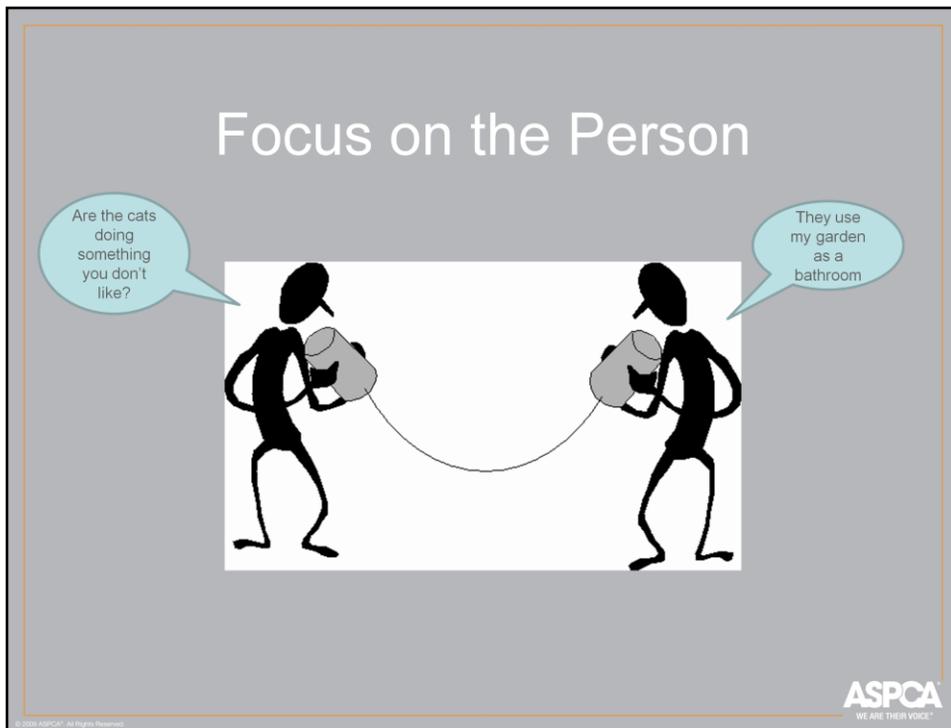
The Good, Bad and Ugly



- **GOOD:** Opportunity to teach; opportunity to positively resolve nuisance complaints; might have some neighbors cooperating
- **BAD:** More difficult to resolve; low neighborhood cooperation; cats might be threatened but you are still able to be an advocate
- **UGLY:** You are threatened

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The first 2 are manageable. The last is a situation that needs to be dealt with very cautiously and very differently than the last two. We encourage you to contact law enforcement and other rescuers for support if this happens.



When dealing with the first 2 situations the #1 thing I've found to be helpful is to keep your focus on the PERSON you're talking to, and not the cats. Approach the conversations by mentioning the cats in a neutral way and watch their reaction so you can tailor the conversation to them. Right now the cats are not the issue. What this person thinks about the cats is the first ISSUE and what you need to get from them is your secondary ISSUE.

Not every single person you talk to will respond to the same thing. Typically you start by asking about the cats – get a read on what their feelings are about the cats. If they like them, great, you have an ally. If they don't, great, you're a resource for them to reduce the number of cats and make them better neighbors.

Try figuring out which of the talking points the person best responds to and focus on that one. For an example on perspective - when I was called about a grant we submitted to a local community group for traps, they asked me a million questions about the natural rodent control. It's the least important to ME and I sometimes even forget to include it but from a community standpoint, they thought it was extremely important. The people you're talking to might only care about one or two of the points you're making and it's in your favor to recognize that and use it as a tool.

Is there a concern they seem to have about the cats – specifically – not just "the cats" but "what about the cats"? Ask. That information is a tool for you to use. Is there a concern about what you're asking for (liability or security re property access for trapping, feeding station nearby or on their property looking dirty or attracting raccoons, diseases, cat feeder too close to songbird feeder, etc.)

Don't be afraid you will not know how to solve the problem. It is okay to say, "I understand why you would be upset. Let me try to do some research for you and see what we can come up with to solve that. We might have to try a few things before we hit the right solution but I'm sure we can come up with something to make this better for you."

Standing in their shoes to the best of your ability and empathizing with them is KEY.

Of course your talking points stay the same

Our TNR Talking Points:



Your Involvement! The colony is monitored for any new cats, you are available to help problem-solve nuisance complaints with deterrents! **Your feeding station is a tool!**

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Less cats – no more kittens, no females in heat attracting male cats to block

Less noise – less fighting over female, less males being attracted to block means less fighting over territory, steady food source means less fighting over food source

Less smell – no more male cat spraying, colony caretaker can help problem-solve with deterrents for any waste management issues

Free natural rodent control – free, safe and easy!

Your involvement – this is not something that will be readily apparent to them since they might see you as a meddler instead but you can certainly sell the fact that you're here now and Animal Control is not going to come get these cats for them, and you're doing it in a positive way

Do We Like Approaching Others?

Does approaching others make you a...

Happy Cat



or

Unhappy Cat



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It's not the most comfortable thing but we can take a few steps to make it a little easier on ourselves.

Approaching Others:

- Travel in packs
- Have your talking points – see what sticks
- Have literature (leave it with them)
- Have a name/contact information
- Polite, confident and professional
- Know your TNR endorsements
- What are they getting?
- What do you need?
- Diffuse with friendly humor



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-1 person can be seen as fringe, 2 people might be a little more legit. 3 people is a group.

-Make sure your talking points are memorized and draw out that ones that get the best response (or problem solve the biggest concerns while empathizing with them – find out WHAT exactly the concern is and tell them what you can do – or that you are willing to do research to problem solve it with them)

-Most people don't want unsolicited literature but you do want them to have it so they have the talking points in front of them – let hem know that you have so many extra and you'd like it if they can hold on to it to give to any of their neighbors who might not know about it that you might not get a chance to meet

- You don't have to be a nonprofit to have a group name (although it's great if you are a nfp). You can have a group name that reflects your colony (i.e. "Lucky Cats" or "South Slope Ferals" obviously not exact location) and create a yahoo or gmail address (just remember to check it or have it fwd to an email address you do use). Moo cards prints 100 mini-business cards for \$20

- Know which large animal welfare agencies endorse TNR (ASPCA, Humane Society of the United States)

- Know what they want. Less cats? Less noise? Less smell?

- Know what you need – and ask politely after setting up the conversation. It sometimes hurts to ask because you think the person will offer help if they want to. But you never know until you ask. Tell them you'd love to work with it on a trial-run or discuss their concerns as to why they might not want to help. (Again, gathering tools.)

You can't fix a problem until it's identified.

Approaching Others:



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(insert role playing example of approaching others about TNR one on one)

What Have You Tried?

Other ideas?



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What have you found to be successful when reaching out to others about feral cats/TNR?

Being Approached by Others:

- Wild card – try to look for your opportunity
- Careful of body language
- Remember your key TNR points
- Give them any info you have that will help – even if it's just a website addresses
- Do they want to give you their contact info?



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-You never know what you're getting when people approach you while you're at a feeding station/on the same block: I've had a huge guy follow me a block to thank me while I thought they were stalking me and I had a nice lady come out of her cute little garden to scream at me, grab the food bowl from the feeding station and hurl it into the road (not resolvable)

- Careful with body language. If you look like you're trying to hide, sneak or take off quickly and avoid conversation, people will read that and think you're not confident about your actions

- (Sometimes -) If there is a nuisance complaint or they might become an ally, try to get their contact information and give them yours. Putting the effort forward to put the communication on a one-on-one level shows them you're serious about addressing their issues and them giving you their contact info also holds them accountable for trying to communicate with you as well.

Being Approached by Others:



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(insert role-playing dealing with being approached by others about feral cats)

What Have You Tried?

Other ideas?



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What have you found to be successful in dealing with people approaching you on the street regarding feral cats/TNR?

A History of Feeding Stations:



Talk to everyone you can and try to get the real story.

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This is my feeding station history in one 10-house radius in under 2 years. – **DO VERY VERY BRIEF REVIEW BASED ON SITUATIONS PEOPLE HAVE ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT – PARTICULARLY ABOUT CONFIRMING INFORMATION AND HOW SUCCESS IS DEFINED WITH REGARDS TO GETTING PEOPLE ON BOARD.**

- 1) Cats fed on the roof, landlord concerned that kittens were dying in the drainpipes and didn't want the cats fed. That problem was resolved with netting, then the building was sold
- 2) Cats hung out in a parking lot that was owned by a guy who owned a pest control business. Did I call him directly? No. I got people who rented from the lot to let me in with their keys and peppered them with questions about the owner. When I got a yellow to green light on the owner I kept an eye out for him and chatted him up about the lot and his business and asked if there were any issues with the lot (no) and that I worked with an animal welfare group and he did bring up the cats and we began to talk TNR. I had his offering me his business discount on traps when he let us in and saw how we were doing the trapping. He sold the lot.
- 3) Lot is demolished along with 2 houses to make room for a giant apt bldg. After talking to the landlord about access to the space before the construction started to get the last 2 cats and permission to feed on the lot, a neighbor approached me screaming and threw their food bowl in the street one morning (not resolvable). Tried to host block meeting about cats – only 1 neighbor came.
- 4) After asking next door (no dice) found a giant gate that led to nothing – just a big gravel unused parking lot. Neighbor said it should be fine (this was a neighbor I had started chatting up because his tenants, who I befriended on the street while feeding the cats, told me he was putting rat poison out for the cats – I asked him if he heard of anyone putting out rat poison outside the rat bait traps and let me know if he did bc it's illegal. Despite this warning from the tenant I kept him in mind because he seemed tolerate and even like the cats, concerned that my new feeding station couldn't accommodate water under the gate in the summer) One month later I find out it's used because the neighbor who shot me down next door got yelled at on my behalf for leaving food. Prepared apology letter citing the TNR project/resources that went into it include free S/N from the A, SSC's help, the PSCC giving us grants for traps etc, how important it is to monitor the colony and asked if there was any way I could continue feeding there if I cleaned up her lot for her or paid rent – brought it over with flowers. No one would answer the door so I left it. Neighbor didn't hear her complain again and I moved my feeding station over... 12 feet to the left in the gate
- 5) Fed in the gate with the neighbor's permission for a month until there was a nasty note about reporting me if I fed the cats. Left revamped apology letter (10 copies) in the lobby of that building with my contact info. The 1 neighbor who came to the "unsuccessful" meeting earlier that year reached out to try to mediate with the 1 apt in the bldg that didn't like the cats (who'd I'd met while trapping and they knew who I was and still never approached me directly) but that also was not resolvable without a giant fight.
- 6) Current station. In the driveway of the accused poisoner. Created a little area next to a water pipe for the cats' water and food to be sheltered. So far no one has complained and he hasn't sold the house. But will this situation change? YES it will.

Managing Our Feelings:

- We've all got feelings, especially when it comes to feral cats
- Talk to someone to get support
- Practice your talking points
- Take as much control as you can – every little bit helps



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-Not everyone can be “on” all the time and it’s even harder for shy people – and throw in something you’re emotionally attached to and WHAM. That’s a hotbed of emotions. Try to divorce your emotions from the conversations and focus on the people you’re talking to. Watch them for *their* emotions, what they’re most concerned with, how they communicate with you and look for in-roads. During the conversations, the people are your focus, not the cats.

- Reach out to other cat people. It’s okay to feel like talking to people is hard and bounce your talking points or your feelings off someone else who has had to do the same thing. Sometimes you have to do this when you don’t feel ready or prepared and it’s okay to feel upset about it but remain calm and professional in the situation and vent LATER. (I have had nasty anonymous notes left about the cats on their feeding stations at times when I wasn’t really in the right mindframe to process it and respond and of course I was upset, but moved on to take some control of the situation and started preparing my communications/efforts to find WHO left the note and WHY they left it and WHAT I could do about it.)

-- Know and practice your talking points so they’re essentially your arsenal and you can pull them out whenever you see an opportunity (these are your puzzle pieces)

-- Public speaking workshops, tips for talking to others

Dealing with Differences:

- New York is full of diversity
 - Gender differences
 - Cultural differences
 - Class differences

- What can we do to get the TNR message through when there are communication blocks?
 - language translators
 - cultural awareness
 - bypass, use representatives



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FCI basic ASPCA TNR flier in English, Spanish and Mandarin under Printable Materials. Also have poison poster for same languages. Can post to Yahoo Groups list for translators – know Russian is a big one.

Resources

Website: Alley Cat Allies – www.alleycat.org



What We Do section has both Help People Help Cats or Tools for Education sections

Website: Feral Cat Initiative



<http://www.animalallianceny.org/nycfci/info-colony.php#community>

Both Printable Materials and Community Outreach sections -
poison posters, community appeal letter, Love Cats/Hate Cats outreach comics

Website: ASPCAPro



www.aspcapro.org

Under Saving Lives and then Feral Cats – community model programs

Group Email List: NYCFerals (must take workshop to join)

<http://pets.groups.yahoo.com/group/NYCFeralCats/>



Mini-Business Cards: www.moo.com

_100 small business cards with images for approximately \$20

Book: Getting to Yes (Fisher, Ury)



Questions:



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