

The Cat's meow!

Second Chance Fund and WARL give feral cats a second chance

By Steve Baer and Jan Beckwith

Second Chance Fund for Animal Welfare (SCFAW) is on a mission. They want to improve the quality of life for cats and dogs in need throughout Worcester County. They are doing so by providing those who are financially challenged in the greater Worcester community with affordable spay/neuter services, providing pet support for catastrophic illness or injury, and providing public education on companion animal issues.

Since October 2000, Second Chance Fund for Animal Welfare (SCFAW) has spayed/neutered over 6,000 cats. Many were homeless – either feral or abandoned companions.

According to the Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (MSPCA), 6 percent of all pet cats in Massachusetts are not spayed or neutered. This relatively small percentage can, potentially, mushroom into 66 percent of all pet cats if even 10% of the unspayed/unneutered cats become lost or abandoned. These cats have the potential to breed like crazy and produce hundreds of thousands of homeless cats before the stress and hazards of homelessness sadly overcomes them.

Cats that grow accustomed to living homeless and without human interaction tend to revert back to a wild or feral state and will no longer seek human companionship. Homeless cats who live wild like this do not make good pets. To prevent unneutered/unspayed homeless cats from producing more unwanted cats, a very successful program called Trap-Neuter-Return, or TNR, has been used around the world. This method is far more humane, and less costly, than the archaic alternative sometimes used by private citizens and municipal authorities who round up colonies of cats, both feral and outdoor pet cats, to kill them. (To learn more about the benefits of TNR, go to www.alleycat.org, the website of Alley Cat Allies or www.neighborhoodcats.org the website of Neighborhood Cats, two nationally renowned organizations with expertise on this topic.)

Since reaching the number of homeless cats in a community is a daunting goal, SCFAW focuses a significant portion of their energy upon spaying or neutering pet cats of financially challenged households. Spaying/neutering these cats addresses the root problem of homelessness by curtailing the flow of unfixed cats into



Some of the cats ready to be adopted at the Worcester Animal Rescue League.

the streets. SCFAW's main venue for spaying/neutering pet cats is through their affordable "Quick Fix Clinics." Quick Fix Clinics are high volume spay/neuter clinics for pet cats that are offered monthly. SCFAW has several clinics throughout north and central Worcester County. SCFAW's fees are deeply discounted from those typically charged at veterinary clinics and hospitals, and are available only to the underserved population who otherwise could not afford it. These discounted fees are even further discounted on a sliding scale to reasonably fit every income level. SCFAW also has a voucher program for other medical care also offered at discount. This voucher program also assists dog caretakers who are in financial need. Anyone who is on a federal or state subsidy program will easily qualify. For those in need who don't meet this standard, however, SCFAW can still help. "We don't like to turn anyone away," said Director, Jan Beckwith.

Additionally, SCFAW offers the Worcester community a broad range of services and programs. For feral cat caretakers, SCFAW will help locate free spay/neuter services and provide trapping assistance. For those looking to surrender their pets to be rehomed, SCFAW will provide a list of local "no kill" shelters and may help contact locally available sources who could potentially take in surrendered animals. SCFAW also assists anyone who is frustrated, or overwhelmed, by a situation with their pet cats or homeless

cats in their neighborhood. Lastly, SCFAW offers medical care that is heavily discounted for pets facing catastrophic illness or injury.

Volunteers form the foundation of SCFAW. A few of the roles available for volunteers at SCFAW include assisting with registration, discharge, literature distribution and scheduling appointments for the Quick Fix Clinics; coaching caregivers on trapping feral cats; counseling people with pet issues; directing people to available resources; performing public outreach; distributing literature at community events; helping to write grant requests; participating in the semi-annual flower sales drives; and assisting with fundraising.

You can log onto the SCFAW website events calendar to view upcoming spay/neuter clinics or fundraisers, to find guidance on trapping ferals, to review medical & behavioral issues, to link to a variety of resources, and much more.

Recently, Second Chance Fund for Animal Welfare (SCFAW) and the Worcester Animal Rescue League (WARL) learned of the "No Kill" movement and decided to partner. During a No-Kill seminar that WARL Director Doreen Currier and SCFAW Director Jan Beckwith attended, they heard compelling facts for a paradigm shift in the treatment of companion animals and brought that information home to share in Worcester County.

"We are a nation of cat and dog lovers," the seminar began. The public

expects shelters to provide animals with a second chance. Instead, though, the shelters are killing millions of animals every year.

This year, alone, roughly five million dogs and cats—and countless other animals—were put to death in our nation's animal shelters. Their only "crime" was that they had no human address. Others who were sick or injured, could have been healed and saved with little effort. Unfortunately, they too were killed. And all those feral cats who should never have entered shelters in the first place – they met the same terrible fate.

We have been told that shelters – through no fault of their own – are merely performing the public's dirty work – with skill, compassion, and dedication.

Nothing could be further from the truth. Shelter killing is believed to be the leading cause of death for healthy dogs and cats in the United States. For far too long, we have been led to believe that there is no other way.

In the 19th Century it was not uncommon cities for public officials to express concerns about stray dogs. The desire to curb perceived "nuisance" behavior by free roaming dogs resulted in the creation of public pounds in the United States. Virtually all dogs rounded up by city dogcatchers, except the few redeemed by their owners, were brutally killed.

At about the same time, "societies for the prevention of cruelty to animals"



Photos by Mary M Brinnatt



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support for community members committed to making a difference in the lives of dogs and cats that need assistance. Whether the animal is too young for the shelter environment, too sickly, in need of behavioral or medical rehabilitation, or recovery time, each will be provided the opportunity to thrive under the shelter's care, but outside of the high-volume, high-stress environment of the shelter.

These two programs will make a huge impact on the number of animals entering WARL. No longer will unadoptable cats, either feral or former pets who have become wild, be brought to the shelter with no hope of finding a home. The TNR program will view their street home as "home" and seek to maintain that location, all the while spaying/neutering cats that are present so as to prevent future births. And foster care will allow temporarily unadoptable cats from taking cage space from those who are ready to find their forever home more quickly.

If you are interested in volunteering for either program, you can contact either group. Each program has its

challenges, but both can be deeply rewarding. Saving lives, by preventing unwanted births and/or providing a safe haven for those animals who need a home environment of love and caring on a temporary basis, can be heartwarming and fulfilling.

If you would like to participate in any of the SCFAW programs, including TNR, Quick Fix Clinics, hotline counseling, etc., please call them at 978-779-8287 or visit their website at www.secondchancefund.org

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