Oahu Overpopulation Project
September 10, 2012
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INTRODUCTION

This project arose out of a desire to increase positive outcomes for cats and dogs at the Hawaiian Humane Society (HHS). The broad objectives of this effort are as follows:

- Review available data relating to pet ownership on Oahu, and trends in admissions, adoptions, and outcomes at HHS.
- Conduct a series of interviews with various stakeholders in the local and national animal welfare community, and with officials in city and state government.
- Review a number of options to address the issues identified
- Recommend a specific course of action for the community and the potential role of the Hawaiian Humane Society, including an analysis of the financial requirements and funding sources

Data

I began with a review of the available data: several Ward Research Public Attitudes studies, animal welfare and veterinary research studies, and internet research. The research revealed some interesting trends and a clear picture of the most urgent issues.

Pet Ownership – information from the most recent Ward Research “Public Attitudes” survey provide some interesting facts about changing trends in pet ownership on Oahu.

- Currently, nearly three in five Oahu households own pets (58%; up 4 points since 2005).
- Dog owners outnumber cat owners by more than a 2-to-1 margin (45% versus 19%).
- Dog ownership has increased from 24% of households in 1993 to 45% in 2012.
- Cat ownership is decreasing – 19% of households have a cat in 2012.
  - A high percentage of owned cats (over 80%) are spayed or neutered.
- Another 17% of households feed cats they do not consider part of their household.
  - A low percentage of these cats (10%) are spayed or neutered.

Admissions – over the past 35 years, there is a distinct decrease in the number of dog admissions, leveling off starting in approximately 1990. In contrast, although there have been significant yearly fluctuations, the number of cat admissions has remained the same or actually increased over the same time at approximately 17,000 per year. In 2011, Dr. Chris Lepczyk at the University of Hawaii prepared an analysis and the trends are summarized in the following graph (used with permission from Dr. Lepczyk).
Adoptions – in the most recent fiscal year, HHS placed over 8,000 animals in homes, which is a huge accomplishment. Even prior to FY 2012, the adoption numbers at the shelter have been strong – this is an area in which HHS has excelled over a long period of time. A strong adoption function will always be critical to the overall success of HHS, and there will always be room for improvement. However, taken with the pet ownership data, it is clear that while an increased focus on adoptions will be very important for the dog population at HHS over the next 10 years, it is not an area of great opportunity for cats. Simply put, there is no way to adopt your way out of the cat overpopulation issue on Oahu.

Outcomes – HHS has been able to say for years that it does not euthanize healthy, adoptable animals. In reviewing the detail, it is clear that overall outcomes at HHS are different for cats and dogs, in large part because of the differences in types of cats and dogs received. Using numbers from fiscal year 2011 as a snapshot, a summary of different outcomes for cats and dogs follows.

For live dogs admitted:
- Approximately 1,900 were euthanized due to behavior issues
- Approximately 1,600 were euthanized due to medical issues
- The rest (approximately 5,800) were returned to owners or adopted out

For live cats admitted:
- Approximately 1,000 were euthanized due to behavior issues
- Approximately 1,600 were euthanized due to medical issues
- Approximately 10,700 were euthanized because they are feral (unsocialized and born in the wild)
- The rest (approximately 3,600) are returned to owners or adopted out

The bold highlight above draw attention to these categories, which total 10,760 for FY 2011. The cats in these two categories represent 65% of all cats received by HHS.

**Opportunity**

The data points clearly to differing opportunities for Oahu’s dog and cat populations. Interestingly, the trends at HHS mirror trends seen nationally in communities with progressive, successful shelters.

For dogs, the overall story is good – increasing ownership, stable admissions, and increasing adoptions. The biggest opportunities lie in converting as many of the unadoptable dogs with behavioral or medical issues into adoptable dogs, and then getting them into homes.

HHS cannot lose focus on efforts to spay and neuter as many dogs as possible, especially those owned by people who have trouble affording the procedure. However, HHS is not faced with many unwanted litters or individual puppies. Dogs entering the shelter tend to be adults, and the opportunity for improved outcomes lies in creating new resources to treat behavioral and medical problems at a much higher level year after year. This will require changes to operations and facilities over time, and these changes are factored into renovations at the current shelter and plans for the second site.

Although there are significant opportunities with the dog population in the long term, it is not the focus of this project. The biggest opportunity highlighted by the data is for cats, and specifically for feral cats in the community. HHS is not alone – cats have become the focus for many communities around the country.

As mentioned above, a large number of animals handled by HHS each year (10,700 in FY 2011) are unsocialized (feral) cats or newborn kittens of mostly feral cats. HHS has essentially no chance for more positive outcomes with these community cats – so the challenge is to decrease their numbers while they are still in their environment.

Although the community cat issue affects HHS deeply, it is ultimately a community issue (like all other challenges facing HHS). HHS does not bear the sole responsibility for solving this issue. I am not aware of another community of comparable size in the United States where the responsibility for so many animal welfare issues rest on a single organization. That situation is beyond the scope of this analysis.

**Focus – Community Cats**

The focus of this project, the cat population, can be described in many ways. Over the years, terms have been based on ownership status (owned vs. partially owned vs. stray), living situation (indoor vs. outdoor vs. free-roaming), behavioral status (friendly vs. feral).
The current terminology used across the nation for cats in our target populations is “community cats.” Community cats are impossible to fit into a neat category. The characteristics of these cats fall across different spectra and tend to change during their lifetimes. They might be tame, feral, or in-between. They may be part of a managed colony, independent, owned or both. They might be interactive with humans or not. They may spend significant time inside human dwellings or none.

Community cats can and do live good lives outdoors, especially in an environment like Hawaii. It is not fundamentally cruel to let them live outside, as long as they are managed and provided with the care they need. It is tempting to think of feral cats as poor escaped house cats – but this is not true in most cases; they are in their own special category.

Although we do not know the exact number of community cats on Oahu, one rule of thumb is that there are approximately 0.5 community cats per household in the average community. U.S. Census data from 2010 show that there are just over 300,000 households on Oahu, which would put the community cat population at approximately 150,000. In reality, we do not know – any estimate is really just our best guess. Hawaiian Humane Society’s 2012 study conducted by Ward Research estimates there are about 300,000 community cats on Oahu.

Across the country, the vast majority of community cats are not sterilized (some estimates are as low as 2%). We know from the recent Ward Research data that respondents who feed stray cats estimate that at most 10% of the cats they feed are sterilized.

Efforts aimed at decreasing homeless cats initially should focus on dramatically increasing the number of spay / neuter procedures provided to this population. To decrease effectively a population of community cats over time, at least 75% of the cats must be sterilized. In reality, we do not know how many cats must be sterilized before populations begin to decrease. The only thing we know for sure is that current spay / neuter efforts have not achieved the desired results.

Currently, the annual number of spay / neuter procedures for community cats on Oahu are as follows:

- Hawaiian Humane Society: 2,000
- Hawaii Cat Friends: 3,000
- Other Cat Groups (estimate): 1,000
- Total: 6,000

Although helpful in keeping the problem from being worse, the current 6,000 surgeries per year have not solved the community cat overpopulation problem. The solution must focus not only on increasing the volume of spay / neuter surgeries but also on reaching individual cats and colonies that are currently not served.

**OPTIONS**

**Status Quo**

Although I do not recommend this, keeping things the way they are is a valid consideration. As mentioned earlier, the community cat issue is not the sole responsibility of HHS. Despite the sustained collective efforts of HHS, Cat Friends Hawaii, and several smaller groups, there is no evidence that the population of community cats has diminished significantly over time. In certain
areas (Hawaii Kai Park & Ride, Kapiolani Park, University of Hawaii), the perception is that colonies have actually increased significantly in size. County programs to address cat populations are inadequate. Unwanted cats are trapped and are brought to the Humane Society. If unadoptable or without owners, they are euthanized. All current initiatives to spay and neuter and humanely reduce feral populations are being led by HHS, the veterinary community, or individual citizens acting of their own accord.

There is no easy solution— even if increased resources are devoted to this issue, it is likely that improvements will be incremental and slow. The only potential game-changing solution out there is oral (and permanent) contraception. There are several organizations working on this type of solution, but right now, it is not reality.

The main reason that status quo is not an attractive situation is that it comes at a cost. There are tangible costs:

- Community cats make up 40% of admissions (10,000 – 11,000 cats yearly). It is not possible to accurately assess the cost of dealing with these cats, but it is significant.
- Currently, HHS is spending a significant amount of money sterilizing community cats (over 2,000 cats a year) with no clear benefit in terms of reduction in admissions.

The current situation also has intangible costs:

- No one wants to euthanize these cats – it takes an emotional toll on everyone involved with HHS – employees and volunteers.
- More importantly, it sets HHS up as a target for local and mainland activists.

Up to now, HHS has not been targeted in an organized way over the community cat issue. Because of the way that these cats skew the overall statistics, this could change. Addressing the issue now puts HHS in a much better position should it face pressure from outside entities.

**Shifting the Burden**

In some communities, animal control agencies and shelters refuse to accept responsibility for community cats, because either they cannot afford to do so, or they choose not to. In these communities, there are mitigating factors that contribute to keeping community cat populations under control:

- Organized groups focused exclusively on managing community cats, providing a referral resource for the shelters refusing to handle these cats.
- Severe weather and the presence of predators that leads to an increased mortality rate for these cats. These are not factors in Hawaii.

Because of the unique role HHS serves on Oahu, and because of the animal control contract with the City & County, refusing to handle these cats is not a realistic solution. There are several other similar strategies employed elsewhere that fall into the same category:

- Decreasing the availability of humane traps to citizens with nuisance cats.
- Charging a fee for cats dropped off once they are collected in humane traps.
- Increasing fees for collecting cats in humane traps in the field.
One other strategy employed in some communities is to return unsocialized strays to their area of origin (if known) after they have been sterilized and have received other medical care. This approach, dubbed “feral freedom,” comes with some significant challenges. Although still in use in Jacksonville, FL, where it debuted in 2008, this approach has not been widely implemented elsewhere.

**Trap / Euthanize**

There has been discussion of using a trap / euthanize (also known as “depopulation”) program as an effective way to reduce community cat numbers. Although we know that there are situations on Oahu where these types of efforts have been utilized, there is no acknowledged formal program in place.

There is a body of evidence that trap / euthanize programs are largely ineffective at reducing community cat populations long-term because other cats “fill the void.” Despite this, there are certain situations in which removal of cats (by relocation or euthanasia) is the best solution.

Although it is a piece of the overall strategy that communities employ to control cat populations, trap / euthanize is not an area of focus for this proposal.

**Increased Spay / Neuter**

There are several models for high quality, high volume spay / neuter services for community cats. Initially, this project focused on pinpointing a specific model to address the overpopulation issue. It is now clear that multiple models must be employed to address the challenge. HHS expertise is essential to coordinate resources devoted to various spay / neuter models in order to maximize the impact on community cat populations. The three basic models are stationary clinics, MASH clinics, and mobile clinics.

One common component of all options is veterinarians with high-volume sterilization skills. Currently, Oahu has just a handful of surgeons with this capability and interest in serving the community cat population. For any of these models to succeed, it is likely that veterinarians must be recruited from outside of Hawaii.

**Stationary Clinic**

A fixed facility that offers spay / neuter services on a regular schedule.

- **Pros:**
  - Has the highest potential volume of the three models
  - No need to transport equipment or supplies
  - Has the potential to be a self-sustaining for-profit or non-profit entity

- **Cons:**
  - Requires transport, especially difficult, for many community cats
  - Facility costs can be prohibitive

- Currently offered at HHS (2,000 surgeries last year)
- Currently offered at Cat Friends Kalihi facility (3,000 surgeries last year) – though this is really a hybrid stationary / MASH unit effort
MASH Clinic
Transportable surgery equipment and supplies scheduled for various locations on an intermittent basis

- **Pros:**
  - Easy access for community cats / caretakers – less transport
  - Least expensive of the three options
  - Easily scaled up or down according to need

- **Cons:**
  - Requires transportation of equipment and supplies
  - Requires sourcing locations
  - Coordination of communications can be challenging

- Currently offered at Cat Friends Kailhi facility (3,000 surgeries last year) – this organization / model could be leveraged at multiple locations around Oahu

Mobile Clinic
A completely mobile surgery facility (trailer or RV) scheduled for various locations on an intermittent basis

- **Pros:**
  - Easy access for community cats / caretakers – less transport
  - Most flexible for pinpointing specific areas
  - No separate transportation of equipment and supplies

- **Cons:**
  - Potentially most expensive of the three options
  - Requires sourcing locations
  - Coordination of communications can be challenging

- Current funding allocated by City Council to Poi Dogs & Popoki for $330,000 to fund a mobile spay / neuter unit to provide subsidized services to citizens in underserved communities.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

**Community Cat Program Coordinator**

In my research and interviews with stakeholders, there was consensus on three topics:

- Everyone would like to see a decrease in the population of community cats\(^1\)
- Stakeholders agree that current efforts are not having the needed impact
- All agree that a neutral resource to coordinate efforts is crucial to success

Beyond that, there are widely differing visions, beliefs, strategies, and desires. There is no shortage of individuals and entities currently working to address community cat overpopulation – there is no one guiding the larger community efforts.

This is the biggest current opportunity— hiring a full-time position to coordinate the efforts of all concerned stakeholders to maximize the decrease in overpopulation. The Program Coordinator would answer to stakeholders in the larger community.

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\(^1\) The most recent Ward Research Public Perceptions survey, four in five (79%) of residents felt that it was very important to have a low cost spay/neuter program available to help reduce the stray cat population.
The two main areas of focus for this position would be increasing spay / neuter procedures and fostering collaboration amongst stakeholders.

**Increased spay / neuter**

Looking back at the three models described previously, the Program Coordinator would have opportunities to increase community cat spay / neuter through each model

**Stationary Clinics:**

- Work to increase in-house community cat procedures at HHS
  - Re-evaluate the pricing structure for these procedures
  - Re-evaluate the hours for drop-off and pick-up
  - Consider performing procedures outside normal hours
  - Potential increase in community-wide sterilizations: 1,000 – 2,000

- Work to increase community cat procedure days at Cat Friends’ Kalihi facility
  - Provide funding for the cost of veterinarians to staff surgery days
  - Turn this into a more sophisticated operation with help (and funding) from Humane Alliance
  - Investigate possibility of purchasing a building or obtaining a solid lease (current building owned by the city)
  - Potential increase in community-wide procedures: 1,000 – 2,000

**MASH Clinics:**

- Help purchase equipment for CatFriends / Feline Fix – current need is surgery packs

- Help establish 2 sites in addition to CatFriends’ Kalihi facility
  - Ewa – Kapolei
  - Windward

- Help manage process for surgical complications / returns
- Send stakeholders to Humane Alliance training
- Potential increase in procedures: 500 – 1,000

**Mobile Clinic:**

- For now, aid Poi Dogs & Popoki if their funding solidifies
  - HHS has already offered to help with veterinary recruiting (paying for ads nationally)

- Leverage this resource as much as possible to provide procedures for community cats
- Take opportunities in the future to develop a mobile clinic dedicated to community cats
- Potential increase in procedures: 1,000 – 2,000

**Fostering Collaboration**
In addition to pushing forward on spay / neuter efforts, the other responsibility should be to work with the community to make sure that spay / neuter resources are utilized. This may be the more difficult part of this position’s responsibilities, but it is crucial for success.

Support existing Trap-Neuter-Release-Manage network:

Managing communications with people in the community who are already trapping and maintaining community cats is very important. Trappers / managers are a resource that would be difficult or impossible to replicate.

- Leverage groups that already have these connections – Cat Friends, Joey’s Feline Friends, Poi Dogs & Popoki, Hawaii Cat Connection
- Support the development of a network of feral cat managers / trappers
- Foster communication between stakeholders
  - Email group, Facebook page, individual mediation
  - Consider using software from Neighborhood Cats
- Recruit existing managers to address areas that are not managed
- Use experienced managers to help train new managers
- Provide resources to existing trappers / managers
  - Provide educational opportunities / training regularly
  - Provide discounts on traps
  - Provide access to discounted medical care for cats

Marketing / PR

- Work with HHS team to develop branding
  - “Community Cat Project” with a new logo
- Work with HHS team to develop messaging
  - Community Cat Project is one part of a larger overall effort to address overpopulation on Oahu through education and spay / neuter. Community cats are in the spotlight now, but there are many other ongoing efforts to help [all] animals.
- Highlight individuals and success stories in separate “spotlights” regularly
  - Newsletter
  - Website
  - FB page
  - Star Advertiser
  - TV/radio

Community outreach

- Use admissions and nuisance data to target specific areas
  - Hawaii Kai Park & Ride?
  - Kapiolani Park?
  - Windward / North Shore locations?
- Liaise with the veterinary community
- Liaise with businesses affected by community cats
- Liaise with City & County / federal agencies / advocacy groups
- “Feet on the street” in targeted areas
FUNDING

Financial Analysis

The cost of the community cat initiative depends on the scope. If a mobile spay / neuter unit is included, the financial needs change considerably.

Based on the current recommendations, the significant costs of the program would be:

- Salary for the community cat program coordinator
  o A competitive salary for this position is $60,000 - $70,000.
  o Factoring in benefits at 25%, the total allocation is then $75,000 - $87,500
- Funding for increased Feline Fix / Cat Friends MASH – type events
  o Approximate cost of $25 per cat, 100 cats per event = $2,500
  o 20 events per year = $50,000
- Equipment needed to make these events possible
  o 50 new spay packs at $300 per pack = $15,000
  o 100 loaner traps at $75 per trap = $7,500

Total potential funding need:

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<td>Total</td>
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National Funding

A question for HHS is whether it is willing to approach national organizations for help. From a public relations standpoint, HHS has been clear in communications that it is a local organization, not affiliated with and not receiving funding from any national animal welfare organizations. Despite this, according to the most recent Ward Research data (2012), approximately 40% of respondents believe that HHS receives money from national organizations. Although the strategy of separation from national organizations has a rational basis, it may be time to reconsider this in light of the potential resources HHS could access through a deeper relationship with one or more of the national groups.

This is a unique time to be seeking funding for a community cat initiative in Hawaii. There are many potential national sources of funding for projects focused on reducing numbers of community cats through spay / neuter and community outreach and collaboration. Because community cats are a conundrum in every major city in the country, the largest animal welfare organizations are beginning to devote significant time and financial resources to finding a model that works. The overall goal is to develop the gold standard and then share it with other communities to provide a widespread solution.

Although there are many groups to approach, some early targets are:
- **The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS)**. For years, HSUS has had a manager of cat programs (currently Nancy Peterson) who helps direct this group’s efforts on feral cats (in addition to a variety of other cat issues). Although they currently do not have any specific grant opportunities directed specifically at addressing community cat issues, this group grants millions of dollars a year to groups around the country who are engaged in innovative programs. In addition, in 2012, HSUS launched a program called “Pets for Life”, which is focused on providing resources to animal welfare groups to more effectively manage community outreach for the services they provide. The program’s first initiative, co-funded by PetSmart Charities, is their Community Outreach Toolkit, an interactive digital document that provides a number of well-developed resources for organizations focusing on community outreach. Pets for Life will also be providing grants to organizations to fund outreach efforts in the near future. If HSUS becomes an option for funding, I recommend a conversation with Amanda Arrington, Director of the Pets for Life program at HSUS.

- **The American Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (ASPCA)**. Although the ASPCA has billed themselves as a direct services organization over the years, their focus going forward has shifted more towards advocacy and development of programs with potential national impact. Although it is unlikely that they would give up their nonprofit animal hospital and shelter in New York City, their efforts regarding disaster planning and management, animal poison control, and fostering collaboration in communities has taken center stage. As evidenced by their efforts to support the South Florida Spay – Neuter Coalition, ASPCA is investing in well-designed collaborative efforts aimed at decreasing pet overpopulation in urban centers. Their total investment in this project could reach $300,000. In a personal conversation with the Chief Operating Officer of ASPCA, Dr. Steven Hansen, I confirmed that ASPCA is specifically interested in supporting efforts aimed at a neighborhood – to – neighborhood approach focused specifically on community cats. If ASPCA becomes an option for funding, I recommend conversations with both Dr. Hansen and with Jo-Anne Roman, Vice President of Operations at the Humane Society of Broward County and coordinator of the South Florida Coalition.

- **PetSmart Charities**. This might be the easiest group to partner with because they are fundamentally different than the first two organizations mentioned in that they do not compete for local donations with HHS. Their funding comes primarily from Mars (the parent company of PetSmart) and from patrons of PetSmart pet stores who are asked to donate cash each time they purchase pet supplies. Leveraging some PetSmart Charities ongoing programs such as Free-roaming Cat Spay/Neuter Program, Targeted Spay/Neuter Program and Spay/Neuter Clinic Equipment Program is possible. I would recommend starting the conversation with Bryan Kortis, Program Manager for the Free-roaming Cat Spay / Neuter Program (and co-founder of Neighborhood Cats in New York City). Bryan’s grant program accepts applications of up to $100,000 a year for a maximum of 2 years / $200,000, and their new cycle opens in early 2013.

**Local Funding**

Local sources of funding for a community cat initiative may be more difficult to come by. If the scope of the initiative is funded on the lower end, it may be possible to piece together several sources of funding to create a stable financial situation.
- **City & County of Honolulu – Neuter Now.** In the current City budget, Neuter Now funding increased from $330,000 to $660,000. This program is essentially a pass-through line item in the budget. Because of the generosity of HHS and the veterinary community, the net cost to the City is only around 10% of the number budgeted. I think there is an opportunity to approach the City with a plan to carve out a piece of the total Neuter Now funding and have it redirected. If the City allows a portion of the budgeted funds to be redirected to other programs rather than used exclusively for pass-through surgery vouchers, it could cover a significant amount of the projected budget for the community cat initiative. Although this source of funding is not a quick solution, I recommend approaching your contacts at the City to see if this is a possibility. I think that the additional $330,000 allocated to the program this year could provide a good opening for a conversation about how those new funds can be spent most effectively on spay-neuter efforts. In addition, since the $330,000 grant in aid to Poi Dogs & Popoki is direct funding (and not a pass through), it gives you one more argument to support the idea of direct funding for an HHS initiative.

- **City & County of Honolulu – New Funding.** During my interviews, I found a fair amount of receptiveness at the City regarding possible funding for a community cat project. In a conversation with Budget Committee Chair Ann Kobayashi, I asked whether a grant in the neighborhood of $50,000 – $60,000 might receive attention from the Council, and she told me she thought it could. In a separate conversation, Customer Services Director Gail Haraguchi made clear that she and others within the city administration would like to see certain community cat colonies eliminated due to the risk of Toxoplasmosis. Although new sources of funding for an initiative are low on the City’s list of priorities this might be challenging, I think it is worth approaching the city for new money if HHS decides to move forward with a project.

As a community wide issue with potential public health and safety concerns, it does not appear that the significant resources needed to address the issue is a county priority at this time.

- **Other new sources of funding.** These are a few brainstormed ideas – I have not evaluated their likelihood of success.
  - Seek out a motivated donor or set of donors – given that 1 out of 5 Oahu residents feed or take care of community cats, theoretically there is a large pool of potential donors might get excited about a project like this.
  - Seek funding from businesses or individual government agencies affected by community cats. If the HHS initiative could help manage the specific cats in question, this might be a reasonable way to create funds.