



## Making the Case for a Paradigm Shift in Community Cat Management, Part One Webcast Transcript

June 2013

*Christie Keith:*

Good evening everyone. I am Christie Keith, the communications consultant from Maddie's Institute<sup>SM</sup>. We can't tell you how happy we are with the huge turnout this evening for this important presentation. Tonight we are very proud to bring you part one of *Making the Case for a Paradigm Shift in Community Cat Management* with Dr. Kate Hurley. Dr. Hurley is the director of the UC Davis Koret Shelter Medicine Program. In this webcast you'll be asked to consider radical solutions to the suffering, stress, illness and death that are the fate of so many cats in our nation's animal shelters. These will include an array of positive alternative approaches such as TNR or not taking them in at all if we can't offer a lifesaving outcome. Dr. Hurley worked as a shelter veterinarian in California and Wisconsin until 2011 when she returned to UC Davis for further training as the world's first resident in shelter medicine. During her residency, Dr. Hurley completed her Masters of Preventive Veterinary Medicine (MPVM) with an emphasis in Epidemiology.

Since completing the shelter medicine residency and undertaking the direction of the UC Davis Koret Shelter Medicine Program, Dr. Hurley has become a recognized leader in the field of shelter medicine. She has

worked extensively with shelters of every size and management type and has consulted with shelters from all regions of the United States ranging from control of a specific outbreak to shelter healthcare programs and facility design. She regularly speaks nationally and internationally related to shelter animal health and we are honored to have her with us here tonight. We'll be starting in just a few moments, but before we do, we have some housekeeping items we need to cover.

In the left hand of your screen, you'll see a Q & A window. That's where you can submit your questions during the webcast. We are doing something a little different tonight, for those of you who have attended our webcast before. While we'll answer your technical questions right away, all of the questions about the content in Dr. Hurley's presentation [tonight] will be held and processed for the follow-up panel discussion, which will be held on July 11<sup>th</sup> with Dr. Hurley and other experts in the field of sheltering. Feel free to submit your questions. We want to know what you want to know about this game-changing material. And we welcome tough questions too; bring them on. If you think of a question after the webcast is over or prefer to take time to formulate your questions, you can email them to us any time before part two on July 11<sup>th</sup> at [communitycats@maddiesfund.org](mailto:communitycats@maddiesfund.org). We'll have more information on the July 11<sup>th</sup> panel at the end of this presentation. If you need any help with your connection during the presentation, you can click the help icon at the

bottom of your screen or go to [event.on24.com/view/help](http://event.on24.com/view/help). You'll also see other little images at the bottom, along with the help button. These are widgets. The green file widgets will take you to the resources Dr. Hurley wanted to share with you tonight, as well as some from us at Maddie's Institute.

The presentation handout is in the presenter's resources and can also be found on our website at [www.maddiesinstitute.org](http://www.maddiesinstitute.org). Please be sure to check them out. If you are tweeting or facebooking during this webcast our hash tag is “#change4cats” –that's the pound symbol, the word change, the number four, and cats. Before I turn things over to Dr. Hurley, I want to say something about Maddie's Fund<sup>®</sup>, which is the leading funder of shelter medicine education in the United States. It is the Maddie's Fund's goal to save the lives of all our nation's healthy and treatable shelter dogs and cats. We received our inspiration for that goal from the unconditional love of a dog named Maddie. Her example led Dave and Cheryl Duffield to promise her they would honor that love by founding Maddie's Fund and helping make this country a safe and loving place for all [of] her kind. It is our hope that you too will be inspired by Maddie to take what you learn here tonight and make that promise come true. Dr. Hurley, thank you so much for being here with us this evening.

*[Brief audio delay]*

*Dr. Kate Hurley:* So now, are we live?

*Christie Keith:* Yes, we are. You bet.

*Dr. Kate Hurley:* Okay, just double-checking, just getting used to the delay here. So, you'll see that I named this a little bit different of a name than we had originally planned for this and I called it the "Tipping Point." It has an optimistic title because I hope that we really have reached a tipping point for community cats in the United States. Those of you who have heard me speak before know that I have come to you several times, probably, and said, "This is the most exciting thing I have come across in my 25 years of working with shelters." But I'm telling you, this time, it's the real deal.

This is the thing that I have been waiting for from the first time that I walked through the doors of an animal shelter when I was 24 years old. As you'll see, unbeknownst to me, this is the thing that I have been waiting for since I was about 4. We are going to start by talking a little bit about where I came from and how I came to be doing what I'm doing. This is a picture of me when I was 10 and I was at the San Francisco Zoo. It was not Halloween or anything. I was just randomly dressed as a cat because I love them so much. And in fact, it went back even earlier than that. My very first ambition was to run a hotel for cats. I spent many hours in my childhood drawing diagrams of tuna dispensers and automatic petting machines, which were to be like an arm that was going to come out from

the wall and pet the cats on demand. There were going to be roller coasters on the roof of the hotel where little mice would go in cars and cats would go in cars behind them. And, it was going to be awesome.

But then I grew up, and I had to get a job that actually paid more than being cat hotel proprietress. I still had my desire to be involved with animals and so there I am [see photo], as an animal control officer for the Santa Cruz SPCA and carrying a cat – it's not the best technique, please note, if you in the audience are in a position of doing that, please put a towel over the cage. But, I didn't know any better. When I look at this picture and think about the day that the news reporter did that article about me, I can still remember how proud I was of the work that we did and the role that I played in that. I can still remember the efforts that I made to take the very best care of the cats that came into our shelter.

Even going down to picking a toilet seat color that would offset their color and would be lucky for them. Because the reality was that the chances for that cat of leaving that shelter alive at that time, were only about 1 out of 4. If that cat had been feral, I wouldn't even have been going down that hallway, because that hallway did not lead to euthanasia. There was no holding period for feral cats in California at that time. It would have been my job to march straight to the euthanasia room and as lovingly and as humanely as I knew how, take that cat's life.

That is something I did for six years, even though I dressed as a cat as a kid. Even though my nickname was Little Cat Hurley growing up. Why? I did it because I believed in my bones that it was the right thing to do. I believed that was the best way that I could serve that cat, that I could serve all the cats and that I could serve my community. I believed that cat would suffer far worse harm if I left her where she was. I believed that cats were meant to be pets and that they couldn't fend for themselves in the wild. In spite of sometimes what the evidence was, of the conditions of the cats coming into me, that they were in good body condition. I believed that it was too risky to leave them out to get chased by dogs, to get hit by cars, to get poisoned by people who didn't like cats.

I also believed that it wasn't fair to the other cats in the community – that unowned cats could serve as a reservoir for disease, that they could make other cats sick, that they would fight with other cats, that they would carry diseases that were risky to humans. I was an animal control officer. I had a responsibility to the people and the other animals in my community as well, as much as I loved cats. We were the Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, not just prevention of cruelty to cats. I believed I had a responsibility to protect wildlife, as well as domestic pets. And, I felt like it wasn't fair to allow these animals, an unnatural predator, to prey on

the vulnerable native wildlife species that were also an important part of my community.

So, I did that work, as hard as it was. I loved it so much. I went to vet school, as you heard. I became the first person in the world to undertake three years of advanced training in shelter medicine and the subject area of my research, again, focused on cats. Specifically, it focused on feline upper respiratory infection, which some of you have heard me talk about through Maddie's Institute webinar or in other context before. After some years of trying to untangle this disease, I came to sort of a poignant and sad and in some ways discouraging and in some ways hopeful realization which is that the vast majority of feline upper respiratory infection is stress associated. It's not that we weren't cleaning well enough. It's not that we weren't using the right combination of vaccines. It's not that we weren't getting the lysine down their little throats early enough in their shelter stay. It's just that we weren't providing conditions conducive to basic well-being for cats. In particular, we needed to give them about eight square feet of floor space in their cage and a cage where their bathroom was separate from their food and water.

It was not a lot to ask, but I know for a lot of you out there, you know, that was too much to ask for the number of cats that you have coming through your shelters right now, or shelters in your community. One of the most

frustrating and painful things that I ran into was working with shelters to try and control their upper respiratory infection and explaining that we need to prevent stress, that we need to prevent, provide these sort of minimally acceptable conditions for the cats in our care. They would say, “Well, we just can’t do it. We just end up getting overcrowded and the more crowded we are, the more respiratory disease we have and then we just end up euthanizing cats for respiratory infection.” And I would say, and I may have said this to some of you, “Well, you know what, it would be better to euthanize a cat when she’s still healthy than to wait for her to get upper respiratory infection, incur all that suffering and then to euthanize her.” I helped shelters to make decision-making algorithms to decide which healthy cats to euthanize because I still felt like that was better than waiting for an upper respiratory infection to take that decision out of our hands.

Then starting a couple years ago, [after] re-reading old research, seeing some new programs, seeing what was happening in different parts of the country with managed intake, with different strategies for handling unowned cats, I came to a kind of troubling conclusion, which is that I had it right when I was four years old. Really, the best job for us is to provide good conditions, maybe not a cat hotel, but the kind of care that we really want to provide for cats. And, that we can do that; we can be responsible to cats, other cats in communities, to people, to wildlife and to ourselves.



The solution is closer to being at hand than I ever could have imagined.  
That is why I'm so excited to be talking with you about this tonight.

I'm going to start with a little quiz. We are not doing Q & A, so I just want you to answer in the privacy of your home – or your shelter or your conference room or your break room, where you are looking at this – do you see anything on here that's really not like the others? You know, you might say, "Well, the cat almost only eats grass," but in a way, no, these are all domestic animals. Right? You wouldn't be surprised to see any of these in the context of a domestic situation. What about this group of animals? Which one of these is not like the others? Well, those are all potentially free roaming, freely breeding, well-adapted wild creatures.

The thing is, there is only one of them that looks just the same in its free roaming, wild living phase as in its domestic phase. So, we can look here at this coyote and say, "That is definitely not a Labrador [Retriever] and it wouldn't make any sense to use the kind of strategies that we use for a Labrador [Retriever] to try and control coyotes." So, we might be worried about coyotes preying on livestock or biting people's kids or eating cats. We know it would make no sense to run out, trap the coyotes, bring them to an animal shelter, put them in a kennel, give them five days to calm down and if they don't calm down, see if we can relocate them to a barn home. And, if we can't do that, to humanly euthanize them. And think

that we would control the coyote population or protect livestock or serve any of those other purposes by that means, right?

When we look at a jackrabbit, we can see that is really different than a little bunny rabbit with floppy ears eating carrots. We can recognize intuitively that it would make no sense to run out and try to capture the jackrabbits and bring them into animal shelters and hold them and try to calm them down. At the same time, as we can look at a bunny rabbit with floppy ears and say, “It would make no sense to take this little bunny rabbit and neuter it and put it out in the wild,” but when a cat, when she just comes through a door of a shelter, we don’t know which one she is. Is she a naughty jackrabbit or is she a sweet little bunny rabbit? Should we use the tools that we use for domestic animals or should we use the tools that we use for wild animals?

That’s the thing about cats. They exist on a continuum. In the upper left hand corner of the slide is the cat hotel and the continuum, where they have, they’re indoor, they’re pets, they have all their needs fulfilled. And, then cats can move from one part of the continuum to the other. You know, pet cats can get lost. They can become less social. They can have offspring that then are wild. Cats that are born into the wild can get more tame, can become more social and can be adopted back into homes. From the cats point of view, it’s not so relevant how social she is, as how well

she is able to adapt to the situation in which she finds herself. Does she have food? Does she have shelter? Is she able to meet her basic needs for survival?

What we know about the numbers of cats in our communities – there are between about 74 and 86 million pet cats and here is some good news. Between about 80% and 85% of pet cats are sterilized. Interestingly, pet cats are sterilized at a higher rate than dogs in every survey that looked at this information. In some communities, pet cat sterilization exceeds 95%. So, for those shelters and communities that are still seeing a huge influx of cats coming into the shelter, it's not necessarily that we haven't reached the pet owners successfully. What is it then? Here is the thing. It has also been estimated that there is between 74 and 86 million community or, I'm sorry, 30 to 80 million community or unowned cats. So, [there are] between a little less than half to about equal the number of unowned cats as pet cats. But, just about 2% of those cats are sterilized, right, because these are the jackrabbits of the world. They are running around. They are breeding freely. They are not necessarily going to respond to our programs that are really targeted at pet animals. That's the thing. Certainly, when I came into sheltering – this is the environment in which I sort of grew up, professionally – this was the work that we were doing, based on the idea that animals that come through shelters have an owner or could have an owner. We worked very hard based on these

assumptions that shelter animals have owners who might come looking for them, so if we are not having a reclaim rate that we want to have for a particular species or an animal, we just need to hold them a little longer, right? Spay/neuter and educational efforts targeted at owners and pets will reduce shelter intake. We need to double down on education for the public on the owner of spay/neuter. And you need to get the word out about early age spay/neuter. All of that is true, but will it work if there is no owner there to hear that message?

We also think that shelter animals could be adopted if they are not reclaimed by their owner, right? We think that maybe we can adopt our way out of this madness and that certainly works for the Labrador [Retrievers], that works for the bunny rabbits and that works for friendly cats that are well-suited to be pets. So, how is that working out over all? Well, pretty good as a matter of fact. Those of you who have been around, hanging around as long as I have, might remember the old days when there was a constant influx of not just cats, but dogs, puppies, baby, roly-poly, black labs coming through the door in far excess of the number that we could find homes for. And, we have seen a dramatic decline. The number of animals both in terms of millions has dropped dramatically and the number of animals euthanized per capita. We have seen a drop of almost tenfold in terms of the euthanasia per capita since the early 1970's. A lot of that has been based on those same assumptions – that these

animals could have owners, that spay/neuter will be effective. We really have educated the heck out of people. We have made spay/neuter widely accessible. We have made adoption much more accessible, much more fashionable. And, we have made a lot of progress. Yeah.

But, we have a big “but” and that’s why we are all here tonight, right? It is not going so well for cats. In some communities, we are making real progress for cats and we can see it, but in most cases, we are not making as much progress for cats as we are for dogs. In most communities still, a higher percentage of cats are being euthanized than dogs. In a lot of communities, when we look at the big picture, we are actually seeing trends getting worse for cats at the same time they are getting better for dogs. This was a study that was done in Ohio between 1996 and 2004. Feline intake on a per capita basis went up by 10%; euthanasia went up by 11%. At the same time, canine intake went down by almost 20% and euthanasia went down by 40%.

These are all on a per capita basis, so this is independent of population change in these communities. [In] Colorado, [from] 2000 to 2007, feline intake [went] up 20%; euthanasia [went] up 38%. At the same time, that canine intake went down by 11% and euthanasia was stable. [In] California, the state where I am delivering this webinar from, feline intake went up by 28%; euthanasia went up by 24% , at the same time that canine

intake decreased slightly and euthanasia went down by over 30%. For those of you who worked in California during those 10 years, that was a 10-year hard slog where we were trying like crazy to make things better for cats and it is really discouraging to see the numbers going in this direction.

This is the hard part of the webinar for me. I talk a lot about numbers and “up 11%” and “down 28%,” but I think it is important sometimes to bring it back to the individuals behind those numbers. This is something I ran across on Peter Marsh’s website, “Getting to Zero” [“Getting to Zero: A Roadmap to Ending Animal Shelter Overpopulation in the United States;” [http://www.shelteroverpopulation.org/Books/Getting\\_to\\_Zero.pdf](http://www.shelteroverpopulation.org/Books/Getting_to_Zero.pdf). You can find this story online. It is part of a longer book. This is a cat who loved kittens. This was an excerpt written by the person who cared for her. “She was a stray, domestic long-haired, blue cream tortoise shell, who was brought to our shelter 29 days ago. She was a very pretty cat. She loved kittens. She didn’t have any with her when she came in, but when she was allowed out of her cage for exercise she would run up to the cages with kittens in them and try to clean them by licking them. On the days that our shelter was closed, I would let her out of the cage, to stretch out of my desk and she would try to play with my pen while I tried to do my paperwork. Two weeks ago she became the cat who had been at our shelter the longest, so I had her photographed and made her pet of the week in our local paper. Unfortunately, not one person called. No one

cared that she was beautiful. No one cared that she got along with dogs and cats. No one cared that she was young or that she had silky fur, or that she liked to clean kittens or stretch out on a desk, or play with a pen.” And those of you who have worked in open intake shelters, those of you who have seen this scenario unfold know what’s going to happen next.

“Today, when other unwanted cats came through our door, filling our cat room beyond capacity, I lovingly took her life.” The next picture is going to be graphic. It is one morning of euthanasia at a shelter where near I live. I am warning you so that you can look away if you want. But, I think it is important to go from one cat to one days’ worth of cats, so we can remind ourselves when we have been doing this for a long time, what’s really at stake. If you can stand to look, you will see a pretty typical summer morning. You can see there are some baby kittens, but a lot of older cats. A lot of cats that probably came in the door in good body condition and in vibrant, good health – whether they were still that way when they were euthanized or not. Some of them may have been feral; some of them may have been friendly. They may have just run out of time. They may have gotten sick. They may have had a behavioral problem that was a barrier to getting them out the door. If you just look at my home state, that morning over the last ten years has been played out to amount to over 2.5 million deaths, 276,052 in a single year, and that averages to 756 a day. What is the cost? What is the financial cost of

making *this* the investment we make in about 3 out of 4 cats that enter shelters in the U.S.?

What else could we have spent the money on that it took to euthanize over 2.5 million cats? What other needs could that have fulfilled? We know what the feline cost was, but what was the human cost? Think about the woman who wrote the story about the cat who loved kittens. I think of myself “Cat” Hurley, 24 years old, and this was my job. What does it do to our hearts to go in as animal lovers and then ask ourselves, to participate in this process day in, day out, year after year, after year? And maybe most important, what is the opportunity cost? What aren’t we doing? What aren’t we thinking of? What creative programs aren’t being creative? What problems aren’t we solving because we are draining our hearts and our minds and our money and our space and our time and our resources on this? Given the cost, we must have a darn good reason for this, right? Why do we do this? It’s not because we don’t care.

For those of you who work at a shelter, what are your goals? I want you to just think about that, look at this slide; hopefully, you’ll see them all on there, for those of you who volunteer or do foster care. What do you think are the proper goals of a shelter in a community? This was what I understood as an animal control officer 24 years ago. First and foremost, we needed to abide by the law. We were an animal control public agency.



We needed to resolve citizen complaints and concerns. If we did not then our boss would hear about it and then we would hear about it. We could not go on and do our jobs if we didn't – if we didn't do that.

We wanted to reunite lost pets with their owners, maintain the health and welfare of every animal in the shelter no matter what outcome we had for them. We wanted to find new homes for pets. We wanted to euthanize suffering and dangerous animals, as humanely as we knew how. We wanted to mitigate the harm associated with free roaming animals – the concerns about public health, pet animal health, and wildlife that I told you about. And ultimately, we wanted to reduce pet overpopulation. We wanted to solve the problems that lead to our existence in the first place. These are awesome goals. These are goals I have been so proud to be associated with all of my professional life.

I have a question for you, though. I think it is a really important one, and it is a little bit awkwardly phrased on purpose. How does admitting healthy cats to shelters, in excess of the number released alive, serve these goals? I'm not asking the question, "How does admitting cats to shelters serve these goals?" Because, if we admit them in the proportion of the number released alive, we do not have a problem. I am not asking how admitting sick and injured cats to shelters serves these goals. I am not asking how admitting cats to shelters for euthanasia serves these goals,

because we usually do not admit them for euthanasia on purpose. We admit them to do our best by them and then euthanasia is the outcome if we admit more than we release alive. So, I am going to go through it, one by one. I know it might seem like this talk is a little bit depressing right now, but trust me. This is such good news, because if admitting cats to shelters in excess of the number released alive does not serve any of these goals, we can stop and we can do something else that is way more fun. So, bear with me. First of all, abide by relevant laws. This blew my mind. I was working with a shelter in California that could not manage the number of cats they were taking in. I looked at the law that I had fought for 25 years that said we had to take in cats; there is no such law in California. There is no mandate to impound healthy cats, and in every other state where I have researched it, there is no law. Cats have benefited in a way, by their historical second-class citizenship status, that the laws haven't been written that says that governments have an obligation to race around scooping cats off the street and impounding them, as many laws are written for dogs. You [will] want to look at this for your own community and see. Often times there is not an obligation to impound, but if you impound them, there is an obligation to hold. So, then there is a stray holding period that is imposed – as well it should because if you are going to bring an animal in, then you might want to give the owner a chance to reclaim it. You [will] also want to look [to see] if there [is] an obligation; for instance in California, there is no obligation for healthy

animals, but there is an obligation to manage injured sick and dangerous animals. Again, that is something that we want to do. We want to make sure those animals are not out there suffering or causing a hazard. You [will] also want to look at whether there is an obligation to take strays, owner surrendered, both or neither.

There are a lot of websites you can find to easily access those resources if you do not know what the law is for your state. If you think you know, I encourage you to go back and just read it again. If you find that there is a legal requirement to impound, I would certainly be interested to hear about it – not because I don't believe you, but because I want to know for future presentations. This is a chance I have to really be talking to a national audience. So, for the most part, impounding healthy cats in excess of the number released alive does not help us abide by relevant laws. It does not serve that first goal.

What about resolving citizen complaints and concerns? [This is] certainly a big one for those of you who have been in animal services or [have been] animal control officers and had to deal with those citizen complaints and concerns. This is a large, nationwide survey that asks people, really, “If you knew that the alternative was that an animal would be euthanized at a shelter, would you prefer to just leave it where it is or would you prefer that it be trapped and killed?” When people were confronted with

that real pair of alternatives, over 80% of them said, “Oh, well, just leave it where it is then.” Fourteen percent said, “You know what, I really don’t like cats. Go ahead, trap and kill the cat.” But, that is less than 1 out of 5 people. Do we want to serve more than 4 out of 5 people and do the right thing by cats? Or do we want to serve a vocal minority by essentially, for their convenience, exterminating nuisance animals that they have in their environment. I think we have an obligation as a profession to really think about that and [to] think about you know, maybe people want, maybe the kid wants sugar cereal, but maybe what’s really better for the kid is healthy oatmeal. We can offer healthy solutions that allow people to coexist with cats that really provide a longer term answer to the problem of a cat leaving muddy footprints on the roof of your car. [It is a] more successful solution and ultimately, perhaps, even more cost effective in the long run than just continuing to respond to people’s inability to manage a nuisance situation in their own backyard.

So, now we have knocked off the first two goals. Admitting healthy cats, more than we are able to release alive, really does not serve those two goals. At least it does not serve the majority of our stakeholders. What about this one: “reuniting lost pets with owners.” This is one of my big “aha” moments. Those of you who have had anything to do much with shelters you know that the number, the percentage of cats reclaimed ranges from terrible to completely abysmal. [It is] only about 2%

nationwide. Part of what that reflects is what I was saying at the beginning. A lot of the cats that come into shelters just do not really have owners. They are unowned or loosely-owned cats. There is not anybody to wake up in the morning and say, “Oh, you know that brownish cat in the alley isn’t around today, I’d better run down to the shelter and see if it might be there.” Part of this low reclaim rate also reflects real differences in how people look for cats and how people think about cats. You know, if your dog is not there when you get home, you really notice it. The dog is definitely not here. There was a pit bull right here this morning and it is not here right now. People know that maybe they should go down to the shelter and get their dog. People know more that dogs should have ID tags than cats. People do not know those things about cats. They’ll wait for a while for the cat to show back up. If they ever do head down to the shelter, by that time, the cat may have already moved on. Best case scenario, it may have been adopted; worst-case scenario, it may have been euthanized. Studies show that cats were over 13 times more likely to be reunited with their owner by a non-shelter means than by a shelter means. Since that study came out, there have been several other studies that repeat and support and expand on that finding. We also see that cats are almost three times as likely to just disappear from households, and the owners never know what happened to them. Put that together, and what we realize is that when we are bringing cats into shelters to reunite them with their owners, what we are more often doing is preventing them from

getting back home. Sixty-six percent of cats that are reunited with their owners are reunited because they find their way home on their own. By allowing cats to remain where they are, we actually improve their chances of getting back home.

So, we can definitely knock off that one. What about “maintain health and welfare in the shelter”? Remember my cat hotel? You are going to guess that this one is near and dear to my heart. This was a proposition in California a few years ago that asked the California voters, “Shall farm animals, factory farm animals, be allowed, for the majority of every day, to fully extend their limbs, or wings, lie down, stand up and turn around?” Not so much to ask, right? But, [it is] a lot more than we had given to factory farm animals before. And, it passed with the widest “yes” margin in the history of propositions in California. Overwhelmingly, we believe that every animal has some fundamental right to just be able to move around and assume normal postures. Certainly, we believe that for cats. We would never want to provide inadequate circumstances for cats, and yet, this slide is almost harder for me to look at than the slide of the cats that were euthanized because I know that there are hundreds of thousands of cats in shelters across America right now in conditions like this. When we see rampant upper respiratory infection, that is our big red flag waving; we are failing to meet their minimal needs for comfort and care. Now that I worked with some shelters that have been able to improve their housing,

I also see the human cost of this. I see how this drives away volunteers. I see how people who love cats, unless they are very, extraordinarily brave, like a lot of the people on the phone right now are, cannot bear to work with cats in this environment. I see how the volunteers come flooding back and the adopters coming flooding back when we present cats in a situation that is more like what we know they need.

I know that everybody who works in a shelter wants to provide better conditions for cats. It's easier for us, as well as easier for the cats, so there is no earthy reason why we would not do it, except that we feel that to meet the constant onslaught of cats that are coming at us, we have to cram them into ever more, ever smaller cages. Unchecked intake of healthy cats, far in excess of the number released alive, definitely does not help us provide for the health and welfare of the animals in our care.

Now, I come to one where there is a little bit better news. One of the reasons we are bringing them in is so [that] we can find them homes, right? That has been a big push; we have gotten a lot better at this. We have understood how to do specials, how to use social media and onsite adoptions and putting them in people's purses when they are visiting us and not looking – two for one and four for a dollar. We have made progress. In California over the last ten years, we went from adopting out

about 60,000 to adopting out about 80,000, so we have gained 20,000 more adoptions.

But, you saw the trend in California. Here's the problem: intake increased even more, so euthanasia increased to keep pace. Adoptions were not able to keep up with intake and some of the cats, we admit, just cannot be adopted. There are not enough barn homes to go around for all the unsocial cats that might be presented if we don't have any control over that. Here is a little good news/bad news slide. We are not the only game in town. We are not the complete masters of the universe. We are not the ultimate arbiters of who gets a cat and where they get a cat from. You can see the lovely green piece of pie, with 29%, which is the percentage of cats that are adopted from shelters and rescues. You can look at those other slices of pie and say, "Hey, we would like to have those slices of pie. And, if we ate those slices too, then we could adopt out all the cats that come into us, unless they were unsocial and we ran out of barns." But, look at what the second biggest slice of pie, at 41%, is: "I got it from my friend or relative, which is to say, "It was inflicted upon me by somebody who couldn't keep their cat anymore and had too many and otherwise, would have brought it to a shelter." The other piece of pie that is also bigger than our piece is: "I picked it up as a stray." So, "I adopted a cat at my expense without ever imposing any problem on the shelter, that



otherwise might have come into a shelter and either needed to be rehomed or not have been lucky enough and might have been euthanized.”

It is kind of frustrating because it means that if we beef up our adoption programs, we might just be picking away at the markets that otherwise would be rehoming cats themselves without our intervention. But, it is kind of good news too, because it means that we don't rush around bringing every cat in our doors the second that anybody thinks that we should. That cat might find a home perfectly well on its own. People are capable of rehoming cats. We can support them by offering them help with spay/neuter, vaccination, microchipping, identification or behavioral health. We can do that even better if we are not up to our eyeballs in healthy cats that we have to euthanize. Stray cats – if we can support them to be healthy and okay where they are, in neighborhoods, if we can't offer them a home right now – well, they might find a home all by themselves.

This was a really interesting pair of slides. One of them I created from California Animal Control Rabies data and one of them came from a shelter that decided that they were not going to euthanize healthy cats. At first they just got overrun with cats, and then they had to euthanize unhealthy cats. That was the situation I was telling you about at the beginning; that is my worst-case scenario. So, what they decided to do is

if they didn't have room, they were not going to make room by euthanizing a healthy cat; they were going to make room only by adopting out a cat. They were not going to bring in cats beyond their capacity to provide descent care because then they knew what would happen – all the cats would get sick and then they would just be euthanizing sick cats. They just formed a waiting list for stray cats. If someone found a stray and wanted to bring it in, and they didn't have room, they said, “You know what, you are just going to have to wait.” At one point during the summer they had 700 cats on the waiting list, and they were a little bit freaked out. They thought, maybe at the end of the summer, they would just have to move and not leave a forwarding address.

But, a really interesting thing happened. Over 400 of those cats never came in the shelter at all. The pie on the right represents what happened for those cats. Let's compare, because these two pies offer an interesting contrast. The pie on the left [represents] feline outcomes for California. That big red piece of the pie, 25 years after I was first in animal control officer, represents the proportion of cats that are euthanized, which is just about steady at exactly three out of four.

The different green pieces of the pie. The biggest green piece of pie is “adoption;” the smaller green piece of pie, at 5%, is “rescued or transferred,” so they moved to another shelter; and, the little sliver, at 2%,

was “returned to owner.” Now you can see in the outcomes from the stray wait list – these are cats that didn’t come in, so the situation was resolved in the community – green and red are flipped. Three out of four of those cats had a definite good outcome, which was either “kept by the finder” or “inflicted on one of the finder’s friends or coworkers,” or, “returned to the owner” , or about at the same percentage from California shelters, about 5%, “brought to another shelter that did have space.” The beautiful thing is, these 400 finders operated as 400 off site adoption centers with a fresh crop of friends and coworkers at their disposal that were not already up to their eyeballs in Facebook pleas and emergency foster calls. They had access so far into the community that we can’t recreate [it] through a single shelter facility. The pink piece of the pie represents either “the cat disappeared” or “the person didn’t call back.” I made it pink because it could have been a bad outcome, but very possibly some of those cats who disappeared just went back home. They are among that 66% of lost cats that just go back home. Those people who did not call back may have found the cat’s owner and did not want to bother answering the phone. Less than 1% of the cats were hit by a car during the waiting period. We knew that less than 1% had a bad outcome, versus 75% of cats admitted to a shelter that did not have the capacity to guarantee care.

More on that a little bit later. I hope you are all hanging out with me, out there in interweb land. We are getting into the final stretch of the

depressing part of this talk. One of the difficult things that is at the heart of what we do is euthanizing suffering and dangerous animals. This is such a tough one that I am going to take it word by word. First of all, what about this idea of euthanizing suffering animals? What about this idea that I had when I was in animal control officer that if I didn't take those cats in, if I didn't euthanize them, they would suffer a fate much worse than death? Well, I also told you that I noticed that a lot of the cats that I brought in actually looked pretty good when I brought them in. This has now been born out, including a nationwide study that looked at over 100,000 cats presented to trap-neuter-return clinics in all regions of the United States, including snowy cold regions and hot funky regions, and found that less than 1% were in such rough condition that euthanasia was really the right answer for that cat. We did a study where we just looked at cats entering a random, government shelter in our community and found that their body condition on intake was a rock solid 5 out of 9. Ideal, better than the portly condition of many of the cats, for instance, that are lounging on my couch as we speak. One thing that we did find was that the cats lost between 10%, 15%, some of them even 20% of their body weight in the first couple of weeks of care in that shelter, just because of the circumstances that they were kept in. They come to us often in good condition. We cannot always maintain that.

When we look at the survival of unowned cats, I found in one study that cats had about a 90% survival rate if they had access to some source of food and shelter. We knew exactly which cats have access to a source of food and shelter because they are in good body condition. We can know that the chances of survival for those cats are 90% or better. For kittens it is a little bit lower. The mortality rate for kittens can reach up to 75%. We want to prioritize getting kittens out of communities and into homes, making sure that they receive care. The chances of a lion cub growing to maturity is only about 1 in 8, even less, half, the chances of the survival of a kitten. It would never occur to us to rush out and euthanize all the lion cubs because their chances of survival are not that high. When we cannot assure survival, we need to think hard about providing euthanasia as a preferable solution.

This was an article that ran in the paper that I think really speaks to a concern that a lot of us have. Feral cats deserve care, not abandonment. Absolutely, I believe cats deserve care and no cat should be abandoned. Also, I believe euthanasia is not care and allowing a cat or any living being to exist in an environment to which it is adapted and in which it has a source of food and shelter, is not abandonment any more than we are abandoning the jackrabbits. Certainly we can help those cats to thrive in their environment by removing just a couple little reproductive parts and maybe one small part of the ear. We can provide care in that way. They

are already receiving care in every other way that they need. So, admitting healthy cats to shelters and then euthanizing them is not preventing suffering.

What about this dangerous thing? This was yet another poll. This is pressure that we are feeling more and more both externally and internally. We do not want to euthanize healthy pets at shelters in the United States and nobody wants us to do this. Seven in ten pet owners say shelters should kill only animals too sick or aggressive for adoption. What does that mean, “too aggressive for adoption?” You know, a giant pack of dogs that is going to run down a small child? Maybe, that is a situation where euthanasia is the only answer, but a feral cat that is not what we mean when we think about aggressive. That is not a dangerous animal in the way that maybe a loose dog can be a real hazard. And, so, here is something where we actually have an opening for cats that we really do not have for dogs. Sometimes cats do form gangs and roam around neighborhoods making threatening gestures and leaving little graffiti’s around. But fundamentally, most cats are not dangerous, and it gives us a great deal more flexibility to respond in creative ways – by leaving them where they are, or managing the situations, asking community members to participate because cats fundamentally are not going to form packs and run down little old ladies and snatch children out of their strollers.

We come to the third word, which is, “euthanize.” This is an article that caused quite a stir. Some of you might have read it. There are two effective main alternatives to the cat hell of TNR (trap-neuter-return). We already decided it might not be such hell, but the author goes on to say, one is and now it’s blacked out, but the word was Tylenol. The author was advocating for the use of Tylenol to poison cats to prevent them from the hell of their existence. Raise your hand out there in internet land if this is a strategy you can get behind. Then think about this second part of the paragraph.

The other humane alternative to the cat hell of TNR is trap and euthanize. What does that mean? What is that out that we provide through shelters as having a humane way to eliminate feral cats? How do you define euthanasia? If you look at the definition in the dictionary, it speaks to an act to terminate irremediably suffering living beings. So, already when we are applying it to an animal that came to us healthy, it’s difficult to achieve euthanasia. Then we also have to think about the experience of a fearful or feral cat as it proceeds through capture, transport, holding, handling, injection and death. For those of you who have done this, you know what I’m saying. If it has been a while, I encourage you to just take one minute and look at your watch because it’s not easy to do, and go stand in front of a cage in a shelter that is holding a feral or fearful cat. Try to open your senses and open your heart to the experience of that

animal. Smell the smell of urine, feces and chemical disinfectants. Listen to the sound of barking dogs and slamming cage doors. Look at the posture, at the dilated pupils of that cat. Take it in. Just let yourself take it in and then multiply that minute by all the minutes in a holding period for a feral cat. And, multiply that by all the feral cats that are held and euthanized.

I use the term euthanasia when I talk about this out of respect for the intention behind that act, but the reality is, it's not something we can deliver to a feral or fearful animal. I think back to when I was an animal control officer. One time, I was trying to pick up a feral cat that had four broken legs and he ran from me on those four broken legs because that was better to him than being handled by sweet Officer Hurley who only wanted what was best for him. That is the reality of what these essentially wild animals would choose. By conveying to the public this notion of humane euthanasia, it really oversimplifies the answer and places all the burden on us and on the cats. When we are honest, neither Tylenol nor transport to a shelter, holding and a lethal injection is a humane alternative to coexisting with cats in communities. We just don't have one.

So, we can cross that one out, but it brings us to sort of the flip side of that coin, why are people so concerned about feral cats? Why would someone even suggest putting Tylenol out to poison groups of cats? Mostly it is not



cat haters, mostly it is people who feel passionately, defensive on behalf of birds and vulnerable wild creatures. Certainly that was a big part of why I did what I did, because I was there to protect all animals. I could see that cats caught birds because we did wildlife rehab at my shelter as well as domestic animal sheltering. You might have seen the splashy headlines of “That cuddly kitty is deadlier than you think” and “Must cats die so birds can live” and some people read that and thought, well the answer is yes. Obviously, why would they be asking it in New Yorker magazine if it wasn’t? The reality is a little different. Undoubtedly, cats prey. They injure and kill wild animals. In some situations, in very focal situations, that has been shown to have an effect on wild populations in islands and isolated park areas. However, interestingly, the effect can be negative and when the cats are removed, the native species thrive. The effect can be positive and when the cats are removed the rodents they were controlling proliferate out of control and create an even more detrimental impact on the very animals we were trying to protect. Cats kill far more rodents than they do birds or reptiles. The reality is, on a continental scale, there is no information to suggest that cats have a negative impact at a population level on wild animals, that there are fewer birds or fewer little weasels or turtles or whatever else we are concerned about because of cats as predators. Although they do prey and kill animals, we do not know that it has a detrimental effect on the overall size of the population.

We know that the impact of cats really needs to be analyzed specifically in each microenvironment in which they are encountered to know what effect that they are having. Do we do that? Before we remove cats from an environment in our communities through our shelter system, do we do an ecological analysis to say, “Well here they might be keeping the rat population down; here we have a vulnerable native bird species that’s ground nesting and we really need to be concerned about that?” No, we don’t have the resources to do that. We are dependent on members of the public who notice a cat on a particular day of the week and bring it to our attention; they either call us out to get it or bring it in to us. It is not sufficiently targeted to protect wild species, even if we determined that the wild species needed protection. I do not want to discount that. There are certainly situations in which we can do a careful analysis and say, “You know what, this really is a high risk situation and we really need to think about how to remove cats as well as to take other steps to protect this population.” When we are sort of casting this wide and untargeted net, we don’t have the resources to identify those situations or make the kind of targeted sustained effort that we need to make to really eliminate cats from those situations. In a way, we are creating a red herring, because we are acting like there is all this sound and fury that we are doing something, but we are not really doing anything to protect the species that need our help. I think that is an important point when we think about opportunity cost. We are not focusing on what other steps we could be taking to protect

those populations and I am going to come back to that again a little bit later.

The bottom line is shelter euthanasia and holding is a very costly method of doing this. Even in circumstances where there is a willingness to use less costly methods, it has been hard to attain control of feline populations through lethal means. Certainly through our means there is no way that we can even afford to attain that level of control. I hope that makes sense and I am certainly happy to discuss this some more in the Q&A portion of part two of the webinar. I am going to end by saying, really, we don't know what harm there is associated with cats on a continental level, but we are not really able to target it to the level that we need to protect native species. We are not succeeding in that goal by randomly impounding healthy cats that we don't know to be a particular risk.

That really brings me, that's sort of a segue into the last point, which is, ultimately, the concern that I had that if we did not impound healthy cats, we would soon be overrun by a tidal wave of cats that would bury us up to our necks, that we needed to keep the tabs on this situation. We needed to keep working as hard as we would to counter act the tide of cats. This was a huge "aha", and this sort of stems from the fact that it's not targeted or sufficient enough to really control cats impact on wildlife. It is also just not sufficient to control feline overpopulation. Here is one last pie. Some

of you are probably getting hungry by now, and this pie shows the proportion of cats that are impounded by shelters in California versus the proportion of cats that are out and about in communities. We know – I showed you the figures in the beginning – how many community cats there are per capita and how many pet cats there are per capita. We can do the math. You can do it for your own community and I have a calculator on [sheltermedicine.com](http://sheltermedicine.com) that you can use to make your own little pie. Time after time, when we look at these pies we find that only a tiny fraction of unowned cats and outdoor cats are being affected by the shelter system at all. That red piece of the pie, 35%, is “outdoor pet cats,” so that [represents] people’s kitties that they allow to roam. They are out and about incurring and creating the same hazards that unowned cats do. Sixty-one percent of the cats in a community will be unowned cats that are out and about. That little purple piece of the pie [shows that] 1% of the outdoor cats in California are rehomed through the shelter system every year and 3%, three times as many, are euthanized. There is no conceivable mathematical or biological model in which removing 3% of a population will mitigate or control the effects of that population. Leaving 3% there or taking 3% out. Taking 6% out, taking 10% out still does not begin to be sufficient to control feline overpopulation or reduce any risk they may be causing to wildlife, to community members or to other pets. We need a different strategy.

There is the link, if you want to try it at home; let me know what you find.

We know– in fact, from a lot of the same science that has really been critical of trap-neuter-return programs – we know from mathematical modeling that 75% to 90% of cats from a population have to be neutered and returned in order to stabilize that population. A criticism from conservationists of trap-neuter-return programs is that that magic 75% number is rarely achieved. But, sheltering and euthanasia is also not magic. You still have to hit a threshold to have an effect; that threshold is lower, but it is still 50%. If we do not hit that threshold, we are not going to control the population and we might as well not be doing anything in terms of how many cats we are going to see again in that same community next year. Less than 5% of the outdoor population are admitted to California shelters annually and if you just think about the number of outdoor cats, 30 to 80 million nationally. The number that I shared with you earlier – and that is actually from papers that are written by conservationists and wildlife advocates – [reports that] the highest estimate of the number of cats that are euthanized in United States’ animal shelters nationally [is] probably about 2 to 4 million. You can see we are barely hitting 10%, at most. We would need to ramp that up hugely if we were actually going to control the feline population, protect wildlife [and] impact community health through shelter euthanasia program. In California, we would have to increase feline euthanasia at shelters tenfold.

So, asking the question, “Must cats die so birds can live?,” is a false

question. We cannot possibly impound and euthanize enough cats to impact the population. We need a different strategy other than euthanasia. Great news, we have one.

We have gone through them all. Admitting healthy cats to shelters in excess of the number released alive, the way I see it and according to my reading of the research, does not serve any goals of a shelter. This was a really interesting series of articles that ran last summer going back to the coyotes. There has also been a lot of criticism about lethal control programs for coyotes being costly and unsuccessful; so, even setting aside whether you think it is humane or not, they just do not work. In fact, in the face of ineffective lethal control efforts, coyotes have larger litters and so there are more of them than ever. Here is a report. “With rifles, snares and aerial gunning, employees have killed [almost 1,000] coyotes and 45 mountain lions at a cost of [over half a million dollars]. But like a mirage, the dream of protecting deer by killing predators has not materialized,” just like the dream of controlling feline overpopulation by euthanizing some surplus cats in shelters. It hasn’t worked. We have tried it. We have really tried. Here, sweet Marin County in California banned lethal control of predators and guessed what happened, we took away the false solution of lethal control and then the ranchers stepped up and found another solution that worked much better. We have learned how to control coyotes on our own and losses have declined 60% to 70% because

they built a fence. The opportunity cost of an ineffective program was that nobody thought to build a fence; nobody invested in a fence before because they were counting on the gunning and the trapping to protect the livestock. When they built a fence, the livestock, low and behold, was protected. Maybe when we invest in habitat, maybe when we encourage [people] to plant bird and wildlife friendly plants in their garden, maybe when we limit pesticide use and harmful chemicals for our lawn car, maybe then we will protect the wildlife that we so desperately want to protect. Maybe through targeted neuter and return programs for cats, will protect that wildlife that we have been trying to protect through euthanasia for so long that has not been working.

Here is the bottom line. We are using a tool that is mismatched to the job. I liken it to trying to hammer a nail with a hair dryer and [trying to] blow-dry your hair with a hammer. It does not work and it hurts like crazy. What if we just stop? What if the picture of a euthanasia table on a summer morning is empty? We might not know the names and the faces of the cats that don't die in shelters, but we will know the numbers and we will know the impact. What could we do instead? Well, one thing we can do is expand the options for live release by shelter–neuter–return and that means very simply, spay or neuter the cat, vaccinate it, ear tip it and if you can't find it a home, put it back where it already was, as long as it is healthy and shows evidence of being adaptive to where it is living in the

community. And, the other part of that equation [is to] limit intake to only those cats that can be released alive, or [to] those cats for whom humane euthanasia really is the best alternative, those cats that are suffering and cannot be helped. Then take the resources that you save, that you would have spent on euthanasia, and reinvest those. Build that program for shelter-neuter-return. Build programs to make animals and cats and people safe in your community. I'm going to finish up. Then we create a happy, unvicious cycle where we have more and more resources to do better and better by fewer and fewer cats that need our help.

This was a fascinating excerpt from this book *Switch* (by Chip and Dan Heath), which is about how to change when change is hard, which is the story of our lives in shelters; totally read it if you have not. Here was a study where they looked at good students and bad students – kindhearted students and jerks – and their willingness to participate in a canned food drive, and so trust me, this has something to do with animal shelters. They asked Stanford students to rate their peers [on] whether they were “saints” or “jerks,” where they feel the kindness to humanity spectrum. Then, unbeknownst to these students, they categorized them as “saints” or “jerks” and then sent out this request, “Food drive next week, bring canned goods to the booth on Tressa de Plaza.” Everyone knew where that was; it was a common location on campus. And, what did they find? Well, they found 8% of the “saints” donate and 0% of the “jerks.” [It]



makes perfect sense, right, because they were jerks. Then they changed just a couple of things. In addition to [saying,] “Food drive next week; bring canned goods to the booth on Tressa de Plaza”, they said, “If you don’t know what to bring, beans would be great; here is a map.” Who gave? Forty-two percent of the “saints” and 25% of the “jerks.” So, the “saints” still did better, but the “jerks” with a map gave three times as much as a “saint” without a map. Sometimes it really is as simple as that. That is one of the really interesting things that shelters have been finding about making change. Sometimes it is as easy as giving people a different map. When they want to resolve a situation by bringing a cat into a shelter, if that’s going to result in euthanasia or overcrowding at the shelter, sometimes you just have to give them a different map and then just like the “jerks” in this study, they are like, “Oh, okay, I’ll do that.” Notice the “saints” were five times as likely to give, remember [that] over 80% of people in a survey wanted cats to not be killed. When we give the “saints” the tools, [when] we really explain to them what we need them to do to help us resolve the situation in a way that is positive for a cat, as well as works for them, they will step up.

This is the map I grew up with; certainly this is changing, but when I grew up is, the expressways all lead to the shelter, like, “You got a cat, bring it in. I’ll come get it. You know, 9:00 in the morning, 7:00 at night, let me know, we are open. Here is the trap. Bring it to us and we will do our

best, but sometimes that is going to be euthanasia.” If you wanted to do something else, well, there was “TNR-town,” but it was kind of out in the sticks and you had to drive by a scary warehouse to get there and there is “Find-the-owner-land.” But, you did not have it easily accessible, like, “How do I find the owner? Can I download a flyer? Can I post it on your lost and found website?” It wasn’t straightforward. We did not encourage people to try and do that themselves. Or “Humane-deterrent-burg”, people didn’t know that there is mechanical repellants that you can use to keep that cat off your car so you don’t have to call us every six months to get a new cat that’s walking on top of your Mercedes Benz. Or “Just-deal-with-it-ville,” you know for people who just need, they are willing to live with it, but if it was easier to have the cat picked up and euthanized then they would choose that route. So, there are a lot of possibilities that people have and sometimes, it is really as easy as turning that map around and giving them some other information. We can redirect them to spay/neuter resources. We can provide those if we have the resources to do it within the shelter, but if we don’t, we can say, “Here are five phone numbers; why don’t you call them; see if you can get in.” A lot of times, the nuisance problems will resolve and you will not have any more kittens being born.

You can limit your field picks up. You can bring the cat in, but we are not going to come get it. We are just going to make it a little bit harder, so we

are not going to provide the map to bring that cat in. You can schedule intake and say, like that shelter that I showed you, “We can’t take it now, but here is some things to do in the meantime and here is how to try to find owner. Here is how to keep the cat safe. Here is how to spay or neuter it if it’s intact. And, let us put you on a list and let us give you a holler when we have room.”

We can say, “We can provide information resources.” I think I have talked about that. We can say, “You know what, we can’t take in that category of cats because we don’t have the resources to deal with it. But here are some humane deterrents; here are some other ways that you can deal with it.” We can spend our time really counseling people on their individual situation – how to stop a cat from getting in their cat door and jumping on the counter; you know, how to stop the cat from digging in the garden and pooping in their vegetables, instead of responding by taking the cat in and spending our time dealing with what results from that. I have to show you just a couple of quick examples to finish. I am going to start with the most dramatic example, which is a shelter that really did not have the resources. They did not have spay/neuter; they did not have a veterinarian in-house; they did not have a facility. They decided to just stop accepting healthy stray cats when the shelter was full, and in particular, not accepting healthy ferals because they could not offer a good outcome. That may not be a broad-brush choice that is right for every shelter, especially if there

are no other resources in the community, but it may be right for some cats, some of the time. Basically, today, for that cat, you don't have the resources to spay it and put it back where you found it. Today, for that cat or for another already in the shelter, admitting one more means admitting one more than was released alive and it is going to mean euthanasia. It is like the cat who loves kittens when another healthy cat walked in the door, whether that is because of crowding or simple numbers. When the cat is not suffering, it is not in immediate risk. It is not causing danger in the community. This is not the answer for the owned cat whose owner [has] died and it has never been outside of the house; we are not just going to leave it out there. This is not the answer for the 40 cats in a hoarding household that are pooping in the sandboxes of the nursery school next door. This is the answer for the healthy cat that is in good body condition, in a stable situation, where there are other ways to solve the problem than shelter intake, when intake would mean euthanasia.

The theory behind this is, you know, we are sort of swimming in this rushing river and we are trying to bail with our little tin cup at the same time. The thought is, first, just stop bailing; step out of the river; shake yourself off; look around and, then see. Can you build a dam? Can you build a boat? Can you learn to swim? Can you create a bridge? Can you do something else when you are overwhelmed by cats coming in?

Sometimes you just don't have time to think about those preventive programs that can solve a problem in a longer term, more meaningful way.

I want to show you what happened at this shelter. We were called in as part of a grand jury indictment. You can see these conditions were wretched. They had less than 15% live release rate. Cats were in these tiny little cages and in carriers. Everyone was critical of them. This was just for the time period we evaluated euthanasia, September through October was 337. After this policy change – and instead [by] providing community remembers with resources, links to websites, information about replants, information about who does TNR in the community – this was the same room, empty and during the same time period. They euthanized less than a tenth as many cats. They had no resources to do anything else. With this one, simple change, everything started to become more possible. Now they have received a grant to develop, you know to set up, a spay/neuter clinic. They didn't have the dam, but now they are beginning to see the way forward to another answer. I'm not saying that is the best case scenario, but if that is where you are, then that is where you begin. I am not going to take the time to show you this video because I am running short on time, but also, they were housing little dogs, 5, 6, 7 to a cage. After they stopped taking in so many stray and feral cats, they were able to repurpose that room with little cages, put some big cages in

there and house those really, highly adoptable cute little dogs one to a cage.

*Christie Keith:* Dr. Hurly, go ahead and hit another slide, because you skipped the video. That's right, thanks.

*Dr. Kate Hurley:* Trying. Well now you get to see the video. Here is a cage in that same room and there is a big sign on it saying, "Please walk me twice daily." Now they can have volunteers. Now there is time to make a sign. What happens for cats also matters profoundly for dogs. It matters profoundly for our ability to respond intelligently to all the situations we are confronted with when we are not overwhelmed by mountains and endless streams and rushing rivers of cats to be euthanized.

Then what about all that breathing room for staff? That is 330 fewer cats that they had to euthanize and that was many fewer cats in the shelter every day. Did they spend that time in the break room eating chips and watching soap operas? No, because they didn't have a break room. They can spend that time on the phone, counseling community members, helping them solve the problem themselves. This is another shelter that recently went this route, again, because they did not have the ability to provide good outcomes for feral cats.

I'll show you a spreadsheet –and you can find a link to this – that a shelter gave for guidance to their staff [to] pick up their phone and ask the question, “Well, have you seen the cat just recently or has it been around for a long time? If it’s just recent, then it probably has an owner listed on our lost and found website. Download this flyer from here. Go door to door; let us know how it goes. Or, if it has been around for a while, maybe it has been abandoned. Here is information about neuter and return programs.” We are not dropping the ball. We are not decreasing our investment in cats. We are not turning cats into second-class citizens that we just abandon to their own defenses. We are recognizing that sometimes the right answer for cats is admission to a shelter and sometimes the right answer for a cat is something else. It is being managed successfully in the community. Sometimes, the right answer is not “no”, but “not now.” Here is how we can help you until you can bring that cat in. Sometimes, the answer is, “We can’t do surgery now, because we can do it only every other Tuesday when the veterinarian is around, but hang on and bring it in.” We don’t feel like we have to have unlimited surgical capacity for pet animals, we also don’t have to have unlimited surgical capacity right away for every unowned animal. Remember, we are touching less than 10% already.

Here is another case study of a shelter that redrew the map. I threatened to finish early for the first time in history, and I see I am not going to do that. I really am almost at the end.

*Christie Keith:* We have a few more minutes.

*Dr. Kate Hurley:* Okay. This is Sacramento City Shelter – so local to me. One of the things they did was just discontinue field pickups for cats. That was something that they offered and they stopped offering that. That was the only big change that they made, and for that reason or another reason they saw their intake decrease pretty steadily from 2010 to 2012. It dropped by almost 2,000 cats. That was not with a big grant or anything super exciting, but what does it mean to have almost 2,000 fewer cats to admit and hold and find an outcome for? It's kind of like being given a giant pile of money. What it is like being given is a giant pile of staff time and space. What they were able to do was reinvest that into beginning a program to spay/neuter, ear tip, vaccinate and return other cats that did come into the shelter back to where they were found. So, they built a dam. They took their savings from reducing their intake, and they built that dam that they really needed. Sometimes, you can just get a grant to build a dam, but I do not want to discourage those of you out there in internet land who do not have a grant. You still can find ways to redirect resources to make a little bit of spay/neuter/return possible. Then, the more spay/neuter/return you



do, the better things can get. Here is the data that shows both intake and euthanasia: almost 2,000 fewer cats admitted and over 3,000 fewer cats euthanized. What happens when we build a robust spay/neuter/return program? If we can't find it a home, and if a stray or unowned cat in good body condition, we are going to fix it and put it back.

Some of you will have heard about the San Jose program, but it has [been] going on for a few years now. We have some really good data about it. This is a shelter that was doing a lot of things right already. They were seeing this really frustrating bump where euthanasia and intake had been going down and then look at that, 2008/ 2009 the recession hit. Intake and euthanasia went up in spite of all their foster programs, off site adoptions, special care and great efforts that they were making. Then between 2008-2009 and 2009-2010, they implemented spay/neuter/return, and look what it did to their intake and euthanasia. Dramatic drop. Intake is down 26% for adults and even though kittens are not targeted by this program, intake is down 25% for kittens. This is not limiting intake at all. Anyone can come. They have not changed anything about the intake policy or process. Cats picked up dead on the road are down 17%. The decrease in intake for both adults and kittens, and the decrease in cats picked up dead on the road, tells us something very interesting. As a result of this program, there are actually fewer cats out and about in the community. If cats are a risk to wildlife, this program is having an impact like nothing else we have

tried. This program is meaningfully reducing the number of cats running around at risk for getting hit by cars, at risk for pooping in peoples gardens, at risk for walking on top of peoples' Mercedes Benzes or at risk for having more babies that are brought into the shelter. This is profound. So, if we can unwind the knot enough to get spay/neuter/return going, we can really solve the problem that we have been struggling with for over a century. Here is my favorite statistic: euthanasia due to upper respiratory infection, the thing that got me into this in the first place, is down 90%, from 900 cats to 90. What is that mean for that shelter, for that community? I can't tell you because my computer is frozen. No, here it is. These are the numbers – going back to the numbers I talked about at the beginning, going back to the cat who loved kittens. This is one shelter in one year: 289 fewer dead cats on the road, 810 fewer cats euthanized for severe upper respiratory infection, 2,883 fewer cats to admit and hold and, 5,303 fewer cats to euthanize every year. That is the equivalent of real money, real time, real resources and a real difference.

I want to encourage you, if you are feeling like this is a lot to take in or a lot to take on, remember, you do not have to do it all at once. We did not arrive here today with no history. We do not have to change everything tomorrow. If you can handle one cat differently. If you can spay/neuter/return one cat. If you can work with one person to keep a cat instead of bringing it into the shelter when that would mean euthanasia,

start small. See if it's fun. Save a little money, save a few lives, reinvest that and grow it a little bit, or if you want, just go big. Let me know which way you choose. Either way, remember there are going to be exceptions. There are going to be situations where it is not appropriate to spay/neuter and put a cat back. There are going to be times when you are going to want to bring in a cat even though you are already full, because that cat is in such a risky situation or creating such a problem. Go ahead and do that. As those become more and more the exceptions rather than the rule, you will find you will have many more resources to deal with those in positive ways. If there is a hoarder who has 40 cats in their house, but you are not full on cats, then you can have the resources to really help make those cats healthy, tame them down and rehome them when that's really the outcome that needs to happen or find another place for them to be relocated. Remember, it doesn't have to be an all or nothing situation.

I'm going to end with this great quote from a book that was written quite a long time ago that speaks to what I think we already knew about cats, but sometimes forget: "After the cataclysm, out of the mounds of heaped-up earth, the piles and wrecks of half-buried cities, the desolated fields of grain, and the tortured orchards, the cat will stalk, confident, self-reliant, capable, imperturbable, and philosophical" (*The Tiger in the House* by Carl Van Vechten). Cats can be okay. They are incredibly adaptable creatures. Sometimes, we just have to get out of their way and let them.

I'll let you tell me what's next. I'm eager to find out. I hope that what we have reached here is a tipping point for cats. This is my proudest slide. It took me 45 minutes on an airplane. Tipping points. I have an idea that if everybody who hears this talk, if everybody who gains access to this information implements these ideas, whether it can impact one cat in your community or your shelter or 100, or 1,000 or 10,000, we as a profession could save a million cats. I haven't worked out the details, but I promise you I am. If you want to be part of the million cat challenge, if you want to let me know and keep track of how many cats fewer are euthanized in your shelter or community, go to that website, sign up for the FEZ project, that stands for Feline Euthanasia Zero— but partly because I like to draw cats with fezzes. I did a little math. If everybody who registered for this webinar saved just 776 cats in their communities. If there are 776 fewer cats admitted or 776 more spayed/neutered and returned, we would reach a million just with the audience this evening. If you don't think you can do that, then just inflict this information on 100 of your closest friends and you only have to save 7.7 cats. Whichever way you do it, I really hope to hear from you in the next webinar. I really look forward to a dialogue about this. You can also email us at [sheltermedicine@ucdavis.edu](mailto:sheltermedicine@ucdavis.edu). Now the Maddie's Institute folks will be sharing some information about where we go from here. Thank you so much for your time. Especially those of you on the east coast where it's almost 10:00 at night, well past my bedtime, I really appreciate you being here this evening.

*Christie Keith:* Thank you so much, Dr. Hurley and speaking to you from the east coast, it's actually almost 11:00 so we are hard core interested in what you have to say. Thank you so very, very much and thank you everyone who joined us tonight – you are all still there who were there in the beginning. It is obvious from the feedback that we are getting on twitter that people are unbelievably interested in this topic, so thank you all for being here and participating. Don't forget to submit your questions to us at [communitycats@maddiesfund.org](mailto:communitycats@maddiesfund.org) where they will be included in part two of this webcast which will be on July 11<sup>th</sup> also at 9:00 PM Eastern. In part two, we'll once more welcome Dr. Hurley, along with Dr. Julie Levy, the Director of the Maddie's<sup>®</sup> Shelter Medicine Program at the University of Florida, Jon Cicirelli, who is the Deputy Director of the San Jose Animal Care and Services, which is the program Dr. Hurley was discussing in San Jose, California. He's also a board member of the California of the Animal Control Directors Association. Also on the panel will be Maddie's Fund President Rich Avanzino, who is the former Director of the San Francisco SPCA which was kind enough to host Dr. Hurley tonight. Hi everybody in San Francisco. That's where I was born. Also [joining us will be] Holly Sizemore, the Director of Community Programs and Services for Best Friends Animal Society. You can register to attend part two by clicking "webcasts" at [www.maddiesinstitute.org](http://www.maddiesinstitute.org). On the slide, please click on the link to take our survey. It might have blocked by

our pop up blocker or be on a different screen, and if it is, we will be emailing the link as well. We would really appreciate it if you could respond to that survey. We also hope you checked out the resources and widgets at the bottom of your screen, but if not, we'll be emailing those links to you, as well as sharing a link to the archived version of tonight's webcast. Thanks again, everyone for being here with us this evening and we will see you on July 11<sup>th</sup>. Goodnight.

*Dr. Kate Hurley:* Bye, everybody.

*[End of Audio]*