

The Linacre Cats Protection Neuter Project 2016 final report

Aims

- To implement a targeted proactive neuter program for cats in the community within the postcodes of Liverpool 20, 21, 4, 5, 6 an area of north Liverpool and south Sefton that is acknowledged in all government statistics to be the most deprived on Merseyside.
- To provide sufficient resources to allow reactive cat neutering where need has been proven and to allow public access to a means tested neuter program across the whole of Liverpool, including low income families
- To forge meaningful links with other community groups working within the postcodes through which the scheme could be pushed
- To collect and assess data on both participating households and individual felines to allow patterns to be assessed as well as guiding future plans
- To draw up a list of factors from the data that would act as indices to allow the charity to assess impact of the scheme within these areas to guide future programs
- To target the surplus cat population living on the streets and from where too many households seem to acquire their cats

Methods

- Funding to the tune of £37,200 was again obtained that it was hoped would pay for over 1000 cats to be neutered within Merseyside, including sizable numbers within the target postcodes. The charity was able to neuter 1150 cats with this sum, of which 455 fell within the Linacre target postcodes. Since the Linacre Project began, 2910 cats from the target areas have been neutered by our funders, the vast majority within the original single targeted deprived area of Liverpool 20 [1081]. The 1150 cats neutered during 2016 include 865 household domestic cats and 285 street or feral cats, representing 24.7% of the total. The 1081 Liverpool 20 cats neutered equates to helping 8% of the 13,800 households inside the postcode in this outreach program. If we accept the view that one in four households own cats, then the Linacre Project has reached out to 31% of the cat owning households in Liverpool 20. Some households will have been visited and assisted more than once within this figure however.
- Since 2009 the outreach program has neutered over 12,000 cats with our funders of which nearly 3,000 have been from within the target areas. The 9,000 figure comes from the rest of the city and we classify it as reactive neutering rather than the proactive targeted Linacre program
- The feral figure of 285 of the 1150 neuters does not really truly represent the street percentage. Another 148 cats were presented by householders for neuter, they themselves had taken in off the street. The true figure for street cats should be 433 or 37.6% of the total
- Contact was maintained with a large number of existing community groups through the offices of Sefton Council for Voluntary Services already working with families, debt issues, advice provision, community support and social housing providers. All were provided with an outline of the project, its funders and three channels to register cats for the project. Many chose to publish the project on their websites and we asked all community groups to ensure all their staff were aware of the opportunity



Making a difference **together** for All animals

Charitable Incorporated Organisation 1160348. (Formerly Registered Charity 508579)

- All public service outlets were given publicity material on the project that the public could access, including libraries, social service offices, meeting rooms, churches and other animal welfare bodies like the PDSA, dog wardens and RSPCA inspectorate
- The charity ran a waiting list for the period once cats were registered, the public were encouraged to register by email, by text or by landline
- Several veterinary clinics handled all the neuters professionally with good feedback between the charity and the vets including, Kirkby clinic [54 cats neutered], Vets 4 Pets Old Swan [536 cats neutered], Whitecross [29 cats neutered] , Vets 4 Pets Walton Vale [491 cats neutered] and Companion Care Clinic Prescot 29 cats neutered].
- Funding was provided by Cats Protection, Freshfields Rescue, Garston Rescue and the Persula Foundation
- Any post- surgery problems for the clinics were minimal in what can be a challenging situation where cat recovery in often chaotic households could be expected to be difficult. Very little veterinary intervention was required after surgery. The project is indebted to the work, professionalism and flexibility of all the clinics in accommodating the Project.
- As with previous years no neutering vouchers were issued direct to households or clinics. More than 77% of the 1150 cats were collected from households, taken to clinic by the Project and returned with veterinary instructions by staff to ensure neutering was carried out. Previous attempts to issue vouchers and allow households to make the arrangements themselves have been met with failure rates of 25% and more, leaving unclaimed vouchers. Increasingly the charity has where appropriate endeavoured to meet household owners at the clinic on the morning of surgery to complete paperwork and hand over to the nurses but non attendance is significantly higher than morning pick-ups where owners fail to answer the door

Findings

- The charity, from the beginning drew up a six points impact plan to measure and assess how effective this scheme on the ground will be. It argues that over a number of years assessment of its collated data will show reductions in age, male-female ratio, litters produced, percentage of pregnant cats etc. The charity has identified these key six areas of impact;
- **Age at neuter by gender**
- **Percentage of female pregnant or in season**
- **Percentage of females already had litters at point of neuter**
- **Average number of litters per females done by postcode**
- **Percentage owned cats neutered ; percentage street cats neutered by postcode**
- **Percentage cats neutered living in multicat households**

Age at neuter

- The project works towards an early age of neutering. For most females that are unneutered by the age of 1.3, a pregnancy is unavoidable. Consistently most of the target Linacre postcodes exhibit too many adult cats being neutered above the average age for Liverpool as a whole. As a general rule, we consistently find that males are neutered at a later age than females and there is unreasonable resistance by householders to tackle male neutering. The average for the city again was 1.3 for both males and females. The average for both sexes in Liverpool 6 was 1.7

Percentage of females pregnant or in season

- A reduction in these high figures needs to be essential in reducing feline overpopulation. The figure for Liverpool 20 has dropped from its previous high of 28.4% over several years and has remained lower than the Liverpool average for some years. In 2016 it was just 8%. The city average was 26%. It confirms the adage that at an average age of 1.3, too many female cats will already have bred

- The Project collects data on dysfunctional homes visited for access to neuter; the term indicates problems with alcohol, drugs and/or hygiene. Often these houses are multi-cat and quite chaotic houses generally with multi-agency needs. Many of them were direct referrals from other agencies. Accessing them and gaining co-operation was often challenging. The charity works on the principle of leaving the adult cats in what is often a poor environment but which will reduce the likelihood of acquiring further animals and then breeding again. Post neuter visits have affirmed this to be the case in most circumstances.

Percentage of females already had litter at point of neuter

Average number of litters per females done

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	
City average	35%	0.65	38%	0.8	33%	0.6
Liverpool 20	31%	1.29	23%	0.4	26%	0.45
Liverpool 21	55%	0.84	23%	0.6	31%	0.39
Liverpool 4	55%	0.66	31%	0.53	22%	0.47-
Liverpool 5	-	-	38%	0.89	32%	0.36
Liverpool 6	61%	1.1	19%	0.28	53%	1.0
						24%
						0.4
						23%
						0.35

Ideally both of these figures should register low numbers and percentages. Liverpool 20 stood at 40.7% of females having already been bred prior to neuter in 2011 and has remained well below this high for four years and the average number of litters per female has dropped from its high of 1.9 to below 0.8 for the last four years. Average litter of 0.8 per female in the ward still means that too many households allow a single litter for their cat. In other words cat breeding in Liverpool 20 was so high that when calculated it meant that on average each female the Project was dealing with had already had nearly two litters. Both results confirm reduced breeding rates in these wards and together with some of the other data here suggestive of project impact

Percentage street cats neutered

- Initial data collection in previous years proved that in Liverpool 20 over 32% of households got their cat from the street. The Project was surprised by this finding but targeted street cats and feral cats for that reason. It is widely accepted by welfare professionals that Liverpool has a huge feral cat problem that is tackled with too few resources. A consequence of this is the larger unneutered household cat numbers derived from the street. Tackling overbreeding in a given area has firstly to tackle the number on the streets. Liverpool 20 still had a 26% figure for street derived neuters but the figure has remained below 30% for four years now. The city average for 2016 was 37.6%. Liverpool 4 was still 47%.

Percentage of cats from households owning over three cats

- The data clearly indicates the prevalence of breeding and being unable to follow through with a plan to ensure any offspring can be accommodated elsewhere. Instead the offspring end up remaining in the same household and the household then realises they require intervention to ensure the same situation does not occur
- With a city 2016 average of 58% of households seeking the help of the scheme having more than three cats and Liverpool 20 still at 49% and Liverpool 4 at 70%, the figures show the scale of the problem still. Obviously most of these multi cat households collect cats on an ongoing schedule year on year and will approach the scheme as and when a newcomer turns up. Many of these households will already have the existing cats neutered some years back not necessarily by this scheme

- It cannot be stressed how surprising the charity found the almost complete lack of existing contact, households in the target areas had with other animal 6% had registered their cat to a private practice. Another 2% of cats were registered to the PDSA clinics in the city. Only 1% owners had previously chipped their cats. Any regard to these figures must conclude that well over 90% of the households worked with had no prior access to advice, guidance and experience from welfare professionals. In many of these postcodes access to private practice clinics was limited. There has never been a vet practice in Liverpool 20. There are no vet practices in Liverpool 6 or Liverpool 5. It is left to a PDSA clinic to serve these three postcodes. It could be argued that part of the solution long term does require veterinary investment within these areas. As it is, it unfortunately is left to charity investment with low resources to provide a lead

Conclusions

- The charity commenced an intensive blanket neuter program within the postcode of Liverpool 20, with the assistance of external funders and working on the ground with voluntary and professional community agencies in 2009. It has taken its method of working and now applied it to other deprived north Liverpool areas
- Its modus operandi has proved to be essential. All the data indicates a clear lack of advice, guidance, contact of any kind with vet health professionals. Only the PDSA operate on the ground, there are few private vet clinics in all targeted postcodes. There is clear evidence that whole communities are bypassed unwittingly until a project like this is taken into the community as a whole. Not surprisingly the community then responds positively
- It is indeed unfortunate that where social deprivation is so endemic, cat neutering is at the bottom of the heap. There is no way round this other than to make provision for it. The charity has always believed that animal ownership should be universal, but there needs to be provision and support
- It is clear that because there has been too little intervention by the third sector [this charity has been working on the ground within L20 well before 2009 but with too little resourcing] there are too many felines within the postcodes. The excessive breeding supplies households within the community, the street's excess further adds to household pet ownership, in all of this there is never the opportunity to encounter a structured pet adopting entity like the RSPCA or Cats Protection shelter outside the postcode and then be guided, to have input into the needs of cat ownership. The community as a whole knows little else but to continue the cycle of breeding. Supply within the community has outstripped demand. Intervention like this is crucial to breaking that cycle for the future
- The data collated from L20 over the years on nearly 1,000 cats and households in such a small geographical area is starting to suggest the beginnings of impact. By looking at key figures and trends from the above tables this charity can start to show measurable change. That these trends need to be replicated over the next couple of years is self-evident and without that proof it would be difficult to be absolutely clear about impact within the postcode of Liverpool 20
- That the project must continue on the ground over a number of years is clear. The Project envisages at least another five years of working in this way with these communities. It is important that the data is analysed comprehensively annually to guide priorities. It is crucial that the charity continues to collate data that can be analysed annually to guide its approach
- The Linacre scheme will focus on Liverpool 20, 21, 4, 5, 6 and 7,
- The Linacre Project will still undertake work with street/community cats across Liverpool
- The Linacre Project produced a feasibility assessment for Cats Protection at the end of 2015 for a Speke and Garston Neuter Project and this has now been rolled out and functioning

Acknowledgements

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