



Montana Spay/Neuter Task Force: Spay/neuter Program



Compiled by ASPCA® and PetSmart Charities® and distributed to the field, September 2007. Visit the ASPCA® National Outreach website for animal welfare professionals: www.ASPCApro.org.

Montana Spay/Neuter Task Force



The task force coordinates community "pet care events" that feature a free, high-volume spay/neuter clinic. The events also offer activities and education that get the word out about the benefits of community-wide approaches to eradicating pet overpopulation.

Stats

- Since 1997, they have conducted 46 events.
- In their first year, they conducted six events and 391 surgeries.
- By 2003, they were performing 2,194 surgeries in four events.
- In larger urban areas, the immediate impact is about a 19% drop in animals impounded and about a 24% drop in animals destroyed.

How Cool is That?

At ASPCA® National Outreach we're especially impressed by:

- Their ability to involve the whole community
- Their diligence at collecting statistics
- The fact that they use their van only to transport supplies, allowing them to be on the road for a longer amount of time

Adopt or Adapt

You can easily adopt this system to reach more remote areas of your state or region. Their approach to community involvement can serve as a model for other programs that you are running today.

Montana Spay/Neuter Task Force: The Whole Story

Read the mission statement and number one goal of the Montana Spay/Neuter Task Force and you'll know you're dealing with an organization that gets right down to brass tacks!

Their mission: "Respect for life. Reverse universal acceptance of killing as a solution to pet overpopulation by using education, low-cost spay and neuter, and community involvement." Their primary goal: "Address circumstances that put burdens on animal shelters and shelter workings, resulting in less violence in our communities."

One very successful program of this organization is their mobile spay/neuter service.



[Who They Are and What They Do](#)
[Ingredients and Prep Work](#)
[Step by Step](#)
[Results](#)
[Some Words of Wisdom](#)

Who They Are and What They Do

Montana Spay/Neuter Task Force, Victor, MT
Jean Atthowe, President

The Task Force coordinates community "pet care events" that feature a free, high-volume demonstration spay/neuter clinic. The events also offer activities and education that get the word out about the benefits of community-wide approaches to eradicating pet overpopulation.

Events run two to seven days, with the goal of altering as many animals as possible during each event. The Task Force strives to spay or neuter 70% of the animals in a community.

In addition to helping communities reduce their current animal overpopulation, the Task Force has the goal of enabling communities to manage their own animal population problems.

Ingredients and Prep Work

Prerequisites

Jean Atthowe cites two key prerequisites for a program like this one:

- A positive attitude toward the community you intend to serve
- A benevolent approach to working with a community, bringing its people and resources together to solve the overpopulation problem

People

For a large event (six surgery tables):

- Six vets
- 37 volunteers

Up-front Costs and Startup Funding

Jean Atthowe estimates that the average cost per surgery is \$15, excluding the one-time costs of equipment purchases. The cost-per surgery does include:

- Supplies used during the event

- \$200 honoraria paid to local vets who participate in the spay/neuter clinic (An honorarium offsets the cost to the participating vet of paying another vet to cover his/her practice during the clinic.)
- Costs of ongoing equipment maintenance
- The number of surgeries each vet can perform during the event has the most significant impact on the cost of the event.

Time Line

Before instituting their program, Jean Atthowe spent a year researching other spay/neuter programs, examining work practices and looking for best practices.

Step by Step

The Montana Spay/Neuter Task Force has implemented three phases of events. Each phase turns over more responsibility to the hosting community. By Phase 3, the community sets up and runs the event.

The steps that follow are for setting up a Phase 1 event, in which the Task Force has the most hands-on role.

1. Obtain funding.

Foundation funding presently supports the Montana Task Force and its costs in setting up and conducting events. For funding the aspects of the event handled by the hosting community, start with the community. For example, you can ask local restaurants to donate food for the event. After obtaining what funds and other donations you can, contact local foundations. You can often find small regional or local family and business foundations (through local banks, for example) that can contribute small amounts for the event needs of the hosting community.

2. Target a community in which to conduct the event.

Identify community leaders, and seek an invitation to the Task Force to come to the community to conduct the event. Literally, ask the leaders to send an invitation on letterhead. From the very beginning, you want this to be the community's event. Send the community a packet of information about how the event will be run and what the community's involvement will entail. The Montana Task Force's web site contains some excellent FAQs that you may want to adapt for your information packet. <http://www.mtspayneutertaskforce.org/faq.shtml>

Identify a key individual who will become the community representative for the pet care event. This person plays a key role, and is a go-between for the community and the Task Force. The Montana Task Force's experience is that usually a member of the community contacts the Task Force about coming to the community. Starting out, however, you may need to make the initial contacts in your target communities.

3. Create a focused task force for the event.

This task force consists of both your task force members and members of the community.

4. Ask community leaders to invite task-force vets to the event, by letter, on community letterhead.

The community, not the task force, hosts the event. Later, the community leaders can invite local vets to come to the event as observers, sharers of expertise, or participants.

5. Find a site for the event.

Some locations to consider: fairgrounds, community centers, schools, empty office space, fire stations. The Montana Task Force conducted one event in an empty department store in a local shopping mall. Think creatively about using the spaces offered to you. One Montana event at a school

used the spacious and well-lit boys' bathroom for cat surgeries (a very secure spot for kitty escape artists) and a hallway for the recovery area.

6. Acquire the equipment for the event.

You'll need two types of supplies:

- Equipment, such as an anesthesia machine, an autoclave, and a van to transport your supplies
- Consumable supplies, such as gauze, needles, and sutures

7. Hold the event!

Results

The Numbers

- Most surgeries in one day: 325 using six surgery tables
- Typical number of surgeries by task-force vets: 35 dogs or 50 cats per day

Task-force vets are highly efficient in spay/neuter surgeries. Each does only cats or only dogs, but also works with the other vets when their animals are done. Estimated minutes per surgery:

- Female cats: 15-20 minutes
- Male cats: < 5 minutes
- Female dogs: 30 minutes
- Male dogs: 15-20 minutes

The Montana Spay/Neuter Task Force collected follow-up statistics in communities where it held a pet care event. You can find those statistics on [their web site](#).

Critical Factors

Jean Atthowe cites three critical factors for success:

- Treating animal owners or guardians as partners, working with them graciously and without blaming them for their community's animal overpopulation problems
- Task-force members "embedded" in the community, building relationships, guiding community leaders to assume responsibility for animals and animal overpopulation, and leading the community toward a change in attitude about this issue
- Appealing to the human benefits of spay/neuter when working with people who aren't especially interested in animal welfare; for example, explaining that altered dogs are less likely than unaltered to bite people

Thinking Outside the Box

The Montana Task Force's program features many astute and effective ideas, including:

- Encouraging the community to take ownership of the event from the outset while the Task Force provides the knowledge and resources to make the event a success (the Task Force is also in charge of the clinic itself and makes all decisions related to that)
- Obtaining statistics to gauge the longer-term success of a pet care event in a community
- Using children as volunteers, typically helping at check-in, washing instruments, running errands, and in the recovery area; they've discovered that supervised children make very diligent volunteers

How They Feel About What They Did

The Montana Task Force is encouraged to see other organizations implementing or adapting their model. In communities where they've worked, they have also seen formerly separate organizations join forces and continue to work together after the event.

Their Next Steps

The Task Force is currently working on developing a guide that clearly explains what a community needs to do to host a pet care event.

Some Words of Wisdom

What Worked

- Reaching out to local vets and getting them at least to attend, if not participate in, the pet care event
- Allowing the Task Force's approach to an event to evolve based on community ideas and needs
- Bringing individuals and organizations in a community together around a common goal

Be Prepared For

- Resistance from local vets: Vets may be concerned about losing business to the task force. They may also criticize the quality of care the animals receive during events. Including local vets in the event can help address this challenge. The event can be an opportunity to show local vets how to become more efficient at spay/neuter surgeries without compromising quality of care.
- "Medically taxing animals," such as strays
- Making sure that owners understand the after-care their pet requires and are committed to following through with it

Tell Us What You Think

With the information we've provided, can you start a program like this one in your organization? [Click here](#) to send an e-mail to ASPCA[®] National Outreach with your feedback.

Montana Spay/Neuter Task Force: Thumbnail Sketch

Montana Spay/Neuter Task Force
PO Box 701
Victor, MT 59875

Jean Atthowe, President

<http://www.mtspayneutertaskforce.org>
mtspayneutertaskforce@yahoo.com



Mission

Respect for life. Reverse universal acceptance of killing as a solution to pet overpopulation by using education, low-cost spay and neuter, and community involvement.

The task force was incorporated in May 1993. The mobile unit for community pet events began in 1996 with an event in Blackfeet Country.

Scope

The task force has conducted community events all over Montana, and have even held an event in South Dakota. The task force has performed approximately 23,000 spay/neuter surgeries since 1996.

Staff

All volunteer, except for honoraria paid to community vets to cover their practices during events

Operating Budget

\$40,000 - \$60,000 depending on the number of large Phase 1 events scheduled for the year