

Does Spay/Neuter Have a “People Problem?”

Or, Zen and the Art of Spay/Neuter



Amy Mills
CEO, Emancipet
Austin, Texas



Today's Journey

- Understanding our beliefs
- The role of beliefs in spay/neuter success
- Our Story
- Social Change and the Spay/Neuter Movement
- Where do we go from here?



“Love me, Love my Owner”



ASPCA
ASPCApro.org

What do I believe?



ASPCA
ASPCApro.org

The Power of Beliefs

*"Your beliefs become your thoughts,
Your thoughts become your words,
Your words become your actions,
Your actions become your habits,
Your habits become your values,
Your values become your destiny."*

--Gandhi



What are Beliefs?

Beliefs are a construct.

They feel "real" to us.

We choose them.



Decoding Our Beliefs

- Beliefs become thoughts
- Thoughts become words
- What words do WE use to describe the people who are most important to our movement (owners of unaltered pets)?



“Irresponsible owners often just don't want to go to the trouble of having their pets altered. And many of them just don't care how many healthy pets we kill in our shelters.”



“Unfortunately, many animals lose their lives every day throughout the United States due to pet-overpopulation and in many cases, irresponsible pet ownership.”



ASPCA
ASPCApro.org



“In most cases the overpopulation of pets is directly caused by irresponsible pet owners who won’t spay their pets.”

ASPCA
ASPCApro.org

What's our Message?



Does it Matter?

- If we truly believe that pet owners with unaltered pets are just uncaring, irresponsible people who will never change, we will never create the opportunities through which they could change
- People change when they feel safe, not when they feel judged or disrespected.



Our Story

- Six years ago, Austin was killing about half our homeless pets each year at our city shelter.
- We already had “free days” but to increase our impact, we wanted to expand targeted spay/neuter efforts for pit bulls and certain zip codes
- At first, the results were less than stellar



Why Isn't This Working?



- We felt like we were failing them.
- “There are some pet owners who just won’t spay or neuter.”
- And then, a wager...



And Then... A Rabies Drive

Out of 300 that show up for free rabies vaccines provided by the City:

- About 70% of the pets are unaltered
- No one is looking for spay/neuter services
- About 90% of the people I offer spay/neuter to say YES!



ASPCA
ASPCApro.org

My WTF Moment: Part I

If they had wanted to spay or neuter their pets, why weren't they calling us or coming to the free day in the same neighborhood?



ASPCA
ASPCApro.org

My WTF Moment: Part II

How is it possible so many people I talked to had no idea what a “spay surgery” was?



ASPCA
ASPCApro.org

My WTF Moment: Part III

If it's true that certain people just won't spay or neuter, why did so many people say “yes”?



ASPCA
ASPCApro.org

Testing, Testing...

- More Rabies Drives, same results
- Experimenting with door to door approach – really promising early results
- Not only are people saying yes – the animals are mostly pit bulls and Chihuahuas!
- They are bringing in their friends and neighbors!



My Aha! Moment: Part I

Just because people are not actively seeking out spay/neuter does not mean they are unwilling to spay/neuter.



My Aha! Moment: Part II

Serving people who are not actively seeking it out creates real social change because it can transform beliefs and attitudes!



If people are already seeking it out, we don't need to change their attitudes or beliefs about spay/neuter!



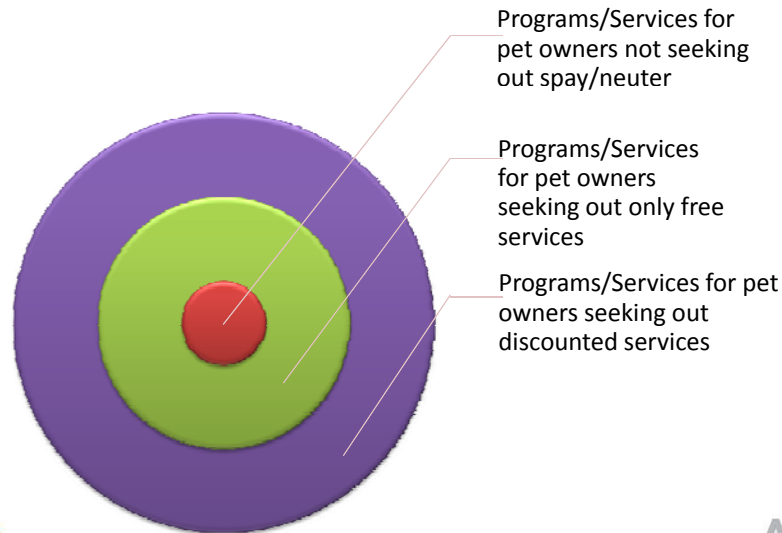
Transforming Core Beliefs



Pet owners love their pets and will do the right thing when given the opportunity.



Our New Programming Structure



What is Social Change?

A significant and sustained transformation of societal behavior patterns and cultural norms over a period of time.

What creates Social Change?

- Technological advances (e.g. a new technology like Facebook)
- Social Movements (e.g. MADD)
- Environmental Changes (e.g. climate change)
- Etc.

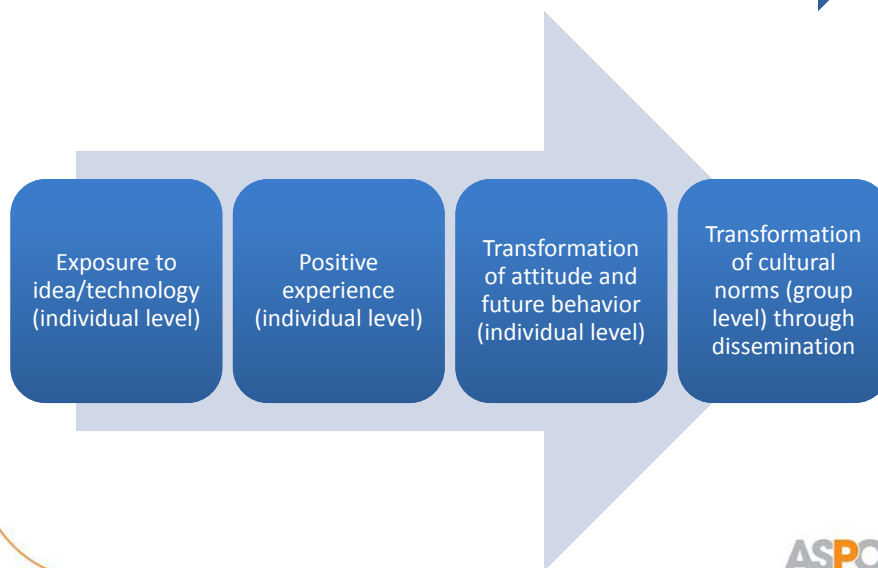


The Power of Social Change

- At a certain point, it sustains itself (not everyone needs the message anymore)
- Cultural Norms are stronger than marketing or laws, it is in our DNA to adhere to cultural rules
- Once it's done, its very hard to undo



Social Change through Social Movements



Early in the Spay/Neuter Movement

- 1969: First spay/neuter clinic in US opens in LA, run by City
- 1973: First non-profit spay/neuter clinic in US opens in California
- 1981: Bob Barker starts asking viewers to spay/neuter their pets



1990s – Today: Golden Years

- Innovations in spay/neuter technique create HVHQSN
- Non-profit Clinics and voucher programs proliferate
- TNR gains legitimacy and support
- Pediatric spay/neuter is accepted by AVMA
- National Spay Day started by Doris Day Animal League
- ASV's Veterinary Medical Guidelines for HVHQSN published
- Targeting by Zip Code, Breed, Species becomes a new focus
- Animal Welfare recognized as a Specialty (this year!)



Before and After

Before the Movement, less than 10% of all pets were spayed/neutered

Pet Owners by Household Characteristics	Estimated percentages of pets spayed/neutered today
Those earning over \$35,000 a year	90%
Those earning over \$75,000 a year	96%
Those earning less than \$35,000 a year	Less than 50%
Those below poverty	Less than 10%
All pet owners, of all income levels	60%



Most People WANT to Spay/Neuter

In our own experience, 85% - 90% of the people we approach with unaltered pets agree to spay/neuter if it is free, immediate, and the approach is kind and non-judgmental



Big Challenge: Taking It to Scale

- Understanding the difference between spays and neuters that advance social change and those that don't – and why we need BOTH
- Cultivate designated funding for free spay/neuter for targeted populations
- Create opportunities for social change through direct engagement with targeted populations based on trust, respect, and faith in people



Prerequisite: Changing Beliefs

- Beliefs – Assess your underlying beliefs, and decide if you want to keep or change them.
- Thoughts – Discuss the changes with your team to see if it transforms thoughts.
- Words – Audit your documents and web site for words that reflect a harmful belief.
- Actions – Create programs and procedures that reflect your new perspective.



"Love me, Love my Owner"



ASPCA
ASPCApro.org

What's Next?

October 3's Webinar is Part II of this Series and will help you act on this new perspective:

Reaching Pet Owners Who Aren't Looking for You

We Will Cover:

- Program Strategy
- Changing Your Culture
- Specific Programs to Get them in the Door
- Guidelines for Talking to Undecided Pet Owners

ASPCA
ASPCApro.org

Questions?

Contact:

Amy Mills, CEO

Emancipet: www.emancipet.org

Email: amy.mills@emancipet.org

Twitter: @AMstation



A FEW COMING ATTRACTIONS FROM ASPCApro

www.aspcapro.org/webinars

- **Ringworm Outbreak Management** (10/02)
- **Reaching Pet Owners Who Aren't Looking for You** (10/03)
- **Starting a TNR Program in Your Community** (10/17)
- **Beating Ringworm: Yes, You Can!** (10/23)
- **After the Grant Award** (11/07)
- **Canine Assessment: SAFER Overview & Research** (11/28)

