



## IndyFeral: Cat Captain Program

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## IndyFeral Cat Captain Program



IndyFeral offers Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR) and colony management assistance for stray & feral (wild) cats in central Indiana using a network of Cat Captains who provide Caretakers with knowledge and tools they need to care and manage their colonies effectively.

### Stats

- 826 colonies throughout Marion County under IndyFeral management.
- 4,529 feral cats altered since 2002.
- 2,500 spay/neuter surgeries anticipated in 2005.
- An estimated 2.6 tons of food collected and distributed to Caretakers in need. 415 feral shelters provided to Caretakers.
- Comprehensive, integrated software program developed to track and manage the IndyFeral program.

### How Cool is that?

We're impressed with the "whatever it takes" mentality of this program and the simple organizational structure that results in uniform standards of feral cat care throughout the community. We're also impressed with "pay it forward" philosophy that encourages those who have been helped to help others. And finally, we're impressed with the powerful software program that ties everything together.

### Adopt or Adapt

While the CATS (Comprehensive Automated Tracking System) software program is not yet available to other organizations, the basic organization would transfer readily to almost any urban or suburban community.

## IndyFeral Cat Captain Program: The Whole Story

IndyFeral is dedicated to stopping uncontrolled population growth and improving the lives of stray and feral cats in Marion County, Indiana. A network of experienced volunteers (Cat Captains) strategically located throughout the county provides individual caretakers with the knowledge and resources needed to develop and implement a strategy for managing the cats in their care. The result is a comprehensive, consistent, community-wide program for management of free-roaming cats.

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### Who They Are and What They Do

IndyFeral  
Lisa Tudor, President

In 2001, Indianapolis, IN was a traditional "catch and kill" city with no programs for feral cats. Lisa Tudor, a long-time animal welfare volunteer and Greg Brush, an IT expert with a passion for cats, got together in 2002, determined to create a paradigm shift in the care of free-roaming cats by providing the community with the knowledge and resources needed to care for them. Originally, they envisioned IndyFeral as a Website directing people to existing resources. When they discovered there were no resources, they set out to create them.

Today, IndyFeral manages a comprehensive, community-wide program for the care of free-roaming cats using a network of Cat Captains located throughout their service area. Caretakers and others seeking assistance with free-roaming cats contact IndyFeral by phone or through their website: <http://www.indyferal.org>. An Intake Coordinator assigns each caller to a Cat Captain who serves as a case manager – meeting with the caller to evaluate the situation and helping with the development of a long-term management plan. The goal of the Cat Captains is simply to remove all obstacles preventing the proper care of the cats. The Cat Captain may educate the caller about colony management and TNR, loan traps, help with trapping and transporting cats to surgery, or make recommendations regarding shelter and feeding. Ferals are altered and vaccinated (Rabies, FVRCP) at monthly Spay Days held in a local clinic using volunteer veterinarians. The cost to the Caretaker is \$20. Kittens and adult cats deemed adoptable are placed through local shelters and rescues.

If finances are a problem, the Cat Captain can refer the Caretaker to Feral Friends, a program of IndyFeral that provides shelters, food; free spay/neuter services and low-cost medical care to those who qualify.

The Caretakers provide ongoing care and health monitoring as well as the day-to-day surveillance that ensures that newcomers will be sterilized promptly to allow the colony to diminish over time through natural attrition.

The entire program is managed through a Comprehensive Automated Tracking system (CATS) developed by Greg Brush that enables IndyFeral to track every cat and every colony under their management.

IndyFeral maintains an e-mail subscriber list for caregivers, rescue groups, veterinarians, animal control officers, humane societies and humane advocates ([feral@indyferal.org](mailto:feral@indyferal.org)). The organization also acts as a mediator and resource in cases where free-roaming cats have become a source of contention.

### Ingredients and Prep Work

#### Prerequisites

Lisa Tudor and Greg Brush were the ideal partners to launch IndyFeral. As an IT professional, Brush had the knowledge to develop the Website and CATS, the database through which the entire program

is managed. Brush remains responsible for day-to-day operations. Tudor had a strong background in administration. She handles marketing, fund-raising, and other administrative functions.

[Alley Cat Allies](#), [Operation Catnip](#) and [Neighborhood Cats](#) provided invaluable resources on all aspects of feral cat colony management and TNR.

## People

IndyFeral has no paid staff. Tudor and Brush have assembled an extensive network of volunteers, including the following:

- Cat Captain Coordinators who oversee the Cat Captains
- Intake Coordinator who oversees the incoming requests for assistance
- Medical and Spay Day Coordinator
- Shelter Program Coordinator
- Food Bank Coordinator

Using a "pay it forward" philosophy, IndyFeral recruits many volunteers, particularly the Cat Captains, from the ranks of those they've helped.

## Up-front Costs and Startup Funding

This was not an expensive program to start. Since there is no paid staff and rates were negotiated for surgeries to be done in local clinics at a greatly reduced cost, with donated clinic space and using volunteer veterinarians, traps were the major start-up cost. Board members with ties to the veterinary and medical communities were able to obtain medical supplies at greatly reduced costs. The founders paid virtually all of the initial expenses.

Today, IndyFeral's \$75,000 annual operating budget is covered primarily through \$20 surgery donations from caregivers, individual donations, grants, events, and sales of feral cat shelters.

## Time Line

It took approximately four months to get the IndyFeral program up and running. The IndyFeral Website was launched in July, 2002. The first Spay Day was held that October.

## Step by Step

**1. Do your homework, using resources like [Alley Cat Allies](#), [Operation Catnip](#) and [Neighborhood Cats](#).**

**2. Develop a comprehensive, user-friendly database to manage the program.**

CATS is designed so that anyone who can use e-mail can use it. The program includes interrelated tables for People (Caretakers, Captains, volunteers, donors etc.); Assets (traps and other equipment); Cats (every cat in the system); Examinations and Procedures (medical records for all cats in the program); and Finances. Not only does CATS enable everyone concerned to track cats and colonies; it also provides detailed information about the number of colonies helped and the number awaiting help. This documentation is invaluable when seeking financial support.

**3. Dig right in and start helping some Caretakers with their colonies.**

This is the best way to find out just what barriers need to be removed so people can do the right thing. It's also the best way to recruit volunteers. Once you've helped a Caretaker, that person is usually eager to help others. The next thing you know, you have an advocate for TNR, a volunteer and maybe even a Cat Captain.

#### 4. Find a veterinarian willing to donate clinic space for feral spay days and volunteer veterinarians willing to work on feral cats.

IndyFeral began by using several clinics. Now they use only one clinic on a regular basis. Two to three veterinarians volunteer. They can alter 100 cats at each clinic.

#### 5. Reach out and partner with other organizations.

When IndyFeral found that some Caretakers couldn't afford their \$20 surgery fee, they reached out to Spay Neuter Services of Indiana (SNSI), a voucher program for low-income owners. SNSI now donates 15 vouchers for free surgeries every month.

#### 6. Set up a Food Bank.

IndyFeral originally solicited food donations from many sources. They now have a partnership with Pet Supplies "Plus" that came about after IndyFeral helped the owner with a cat colony behind one of his four stores. There is now an IndyFeral cart at the checkout in each store. Customers buy food and put it in the cart in the ultimate "win/win" situation. The food is given to Caretakers who cannot afford to feed their colonies.

#### 7. Develop a source for feral cat shelters.

IndyFeral modified a plan developed by Alley Cat Allies and "did a lot of dumpster diving" to get the materials for their first shelters. They have now developed a partnership with the Putnam County Correctional Facility to have the inmates build the shelters. The cost to build each shelter is \$20. IndyFeral sells them for \$40, providing funds to buy additional materials. Shelters are given to those Caretakers who cannot afford them; however interest in the shelters has grown so the organization now produces the shelters in kit form, available for shipping across the country as a revenue source.

## Results

### The Numbers

- In 2003, IndyFeral managed 460 colonies. Since then 366 new colonies have been added.
- In 2003, IndyFeral did 1,554 surgeries. In 2005, they're on track to do 2,500.
- In 2004, 415 feral cat shelters were produced. 120 were provided free to Caretakers through the Feral Friends program.
- In 2004, an estimated 2.6 tons of food was collected and distributed to Caretakers in need through Feral Friends.
- Reduction in colony population at specific sites has been documented.
- In 2004, the humane society and animal control shelters began tracking their numbers using identical software. Euthanasia is now being tracked monthly in an effort to identify a decline.

IndyFeral was named runner-up for the Alley Cat Allies TNR Group of the Year in 2004, just two years after its founding.

### Critical Factors

- The program is basically very simple in its design and not expensive to operate.
- People really wanted to do the right thing. They just needed someone to provide them with tools and the leadership.
- IndyFeral was and is willing to do "whatever it takes" to make sure the cats are cared for properly. If a Caretaker wants only to feed, the Cat Captain will handle everything else. If a person can't or won't trap, the Captain handles the trapping. If money is the issue, food is provided. Every situation is handled individually.

- IndyFeral's policies and management stayed focused on the mission: what is of most benefit to the cats and to the community.
- Since TNR runs against the conventional wisdom, and can be a "hard sell", everything must be run professionally. Engaging in unprofessional behavior only hurts the organization, the cause and ultimately the animals.
- Brush's IT experience and passion for research and development were key. There was no template. He had to develop it.
- Plunging in and bringing the Caretakers to the table enabled the leadership to recruit volunteers and develop strategies that directly met the needs of the people in the trenches.

## Thinking Outside the Box

- IndyFeral decided that it accomplished nothing simply to blame overpopulation on irresponsible pet owners. They set out to give people the resources (information, education, financial, etc.) to become responsible.
- The monthly Spay Days are used to recruit new veterinarians and introduce them to the concept of Trap-Neuter-Return, high-volume and early-age spay/neuter. The clinics also provide excellent opportunities to sell the program to government officials and potential donors.

## How They Feel About What They Did

"If I can affect positive change in people's thinking or level of education regarding these cats," Tudor states, "I feel I have done my job. Feral cats have a basic instinct to live and live the best life they can. They deserve care, compassion and protection - and empowering people with the tools, resources, and education to make this change (pay it forward) is the best!"

## Their Next Steps

Brush is planning to refine the CATS program and make it applicable to other organizations. Once that's accomplished, IndyFeral plans to make the program available to groups across the country.

## Some Words of Wisdom

### What Worked

Jumping right in and starting to help caretakers with their cats.

### Be Prepared For

The need to educate the community about feral cats. Even the veterinary community may not be knowledgeable about ferals and their care. Although the veterinarians probably don't want to care for these cats, they may still worry that you're cutting into their business. There are more misconceptions about TNR than good information, so be prepared to answer and address any, and all of them.

### 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.

## IndyFeral: Thumbnail Sketch

IndyFeral, Inc.  
P.O. Box 30054  
Indianapolis, IN 46230

<http://www.indyferal.org>

As part of their belief in respect and compassion for all living creatures, IndyFeral Inc. seeks to reduce stray and feral (wild) cat overpopulation through the non-lethal method of Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR), not "trap and kill."



### Staff

- No paid administrative staff
- Extensive volunteer staff including:
  - A Director who handles fund-raising and administration
  - A Director of Operations who handles day-to-day operations as well as the Website and CATS database
  - Cat Captain Coordinators who oversee the Cat Captains
  - Intake Coordinator who oversees the incoming requests for assistance
  - A Medical and Spay Day Coordinator
  - A Shelter Program Coordinator
  - A Food Bank Coordinator

### Operating Budget

\$75,000

### Business Type

501(c)(3) nonprofit