



Oklahoma Spay Network: In-Clinic Clinics



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.

Oklahoma Spay Network: In-Clinic Clinics

Low-cost spay/neuter clinics within for-profit vet clinics



The Oklahoma Spay Network is a project of the Homeward Bound Humane Society of Durant, OK. The network is a coalition of roughly 20 animal organizations who coordinate low-cost spay/neuter services in rural counties of southeastern Oklahoma.

Their In-Clinic Clinic program recruits private veterinarians to perform high-volume spay/neuter surgeries for pets of low-income owners. The vets work in their own clinics, with their own medical staff, one weekend a month.

Stats

- A monthly clinic doing 35 surgeries per day for 12 months can sterilize 420 pets. In a rural community, with the program targeted toward low-income pet owners, this volume can have significant results.
- Many of the counties with in-clinic clinics don't have shelters, and it is hard to obtain statistics on animal populations in these areas. In Bristow, a town of 5000 people, the shelter used to kill 700-800 pets a year. Now that figure is under 100. This shelter's intake of litters was reduced by 90% through spay/neuter efforts.

How Cool is That?

This program has minimal start-up costs and can be set up in a short time. It engages the talents of local veterinarians, provides their practice with a supplementary cash flow, and doesn't impinge on business from their paying clients.

Adopt or Adapt

In-Clinic Clinics are possible in any community with a sponsoring organization to contact the veterinarians, promote the program to get clients, and recruit volunteers to work at the clinic. In rural areas with low population, once-a-month clinics work well. In a community with a greater density of population, and more veterinarians, the program could be run at a different veterinary clinic each weekend of the month.

You may want to look at our profiles of Pets Alive, Operation FELIX, and Humane Alliance for strategies to identify and target low-income populations in your region.

Oklahoma Spay Network: In-Clinic Clinics: The Whole Story

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Who They Are and What They Do

Oklahoma Spay Network, a project of the Homeward Bound Humane Society, Durant, Oklahoma
 Ruth Steinberger, Director

The Oklahoma Spay Network consists of twenty animal organizations in southeastern Oklahoma coordinating to provide low-cost spay/neuter services to rural counties in the region. Many of the counties do not have an animal shelter or public animal control services. Individuals in the area who take in animals are very aware of the problem of surplus pets there. Many pets probably die unaccounted for, due to the owners' inability to care for them.

The In-Clinic Clinic is a key program of the Oklahoma Spay Network. In this program, private veterinarians, in their own facilities, do high-volume spay/neuter one day per month.

Although the Oklahoma Spay Network has many programs and a paid organizer, the In Clinic-Clinic can be done in any community. The key component is a sponsoring organization to contact the veterinarians, promote the program to get clients, and recruit volunteers to work at the clinic once a month.

Ingredients and Prep Work

Prerequisites

- High volume of unaltered pets
- Presence of a significant number of low-income pet owners
- Veterinary clinic located in an area of need
- Sponsoring organization 501(c)(3) or government agency to set up the program and handle the financial transactions

People

- Volunteers or paid staff to put the program together
- Volunteers or paid staff to promote the program (use your judgment)
- Volunteers to take calls and set appointments

- Veterinarian paid for one day per month
- Veterinary Technician paid for one day per month
- Minimum of 2 to 3 volunteers throughout the day of the In-Clinic Clinic (3 to 4 volunteers is preferable); volunteers can work in shifts so that each volunteer works only 2-3 hours during the day:
 - Handling paperwork and animal intake
 - Collecting payment
 - Clean instruments to be circulated through sterilizer
 - Move animals to and from surgery and back to their cages
 - Animal pickup and explanation of follow-up care to each client
 - Clinic cleanup

Up-front Costs and Startup Funding

The vet clinic provides staff, equipment, and medical supplies for the surgeries. Because the vets are working in their own clinics, the program has no expenses for rented space, equipment, or transportation. The vets are paid out of the proceeds of the day.

The program does have some minimal expenses for each clinic:

- Costs for flyers or a news release to promote the program
- Office supplies, such as intake pens, forms, clip boards, masking tape, Sharpie markers, paperclips, carbon paper for owner's copy of forms if no photocopy machine is available
- Newspapers for cages, towels, paper towels
- Extra pet carriers (cost purchased new: approximately \$35 per cat-size carrier)
- Coffee and donut supplies (highly recommended!)

With good community networking and support for the vet, it's possible to obtain these items through donations or at reduced cost.

Timeline

After a veterinarian agrees to do the clinic, the start-up timeline can be as short as 4-6 weeks. This time is needed to promote the event, line-up and orient volunteers, and purchase basic supplies.

Step by Step

1. Identify a clinic with veterinarians willing to host the clinic.

Identify veterinary clinics in the targeted area. Rural areas such as southeastern Oklahoma may have no more than one or two veterinary clinics in a county.

- Assure the veterinarian that only low-income clients will qualify for this service. (In SE Oklahoma, the cut-off to qualify is \$25,000 annual income.) This is important, as the vets do not want to provide low-cost services for people who can afford to be regular clients. Proof of qualification can be a pay stub, evidence of receipt of food stamps or other public assistance programs, disability, or a tax form.
- Ask the veterinarian what his/her daily profit is on normal workdays. Offer to pay the veterinarian two or more times his/her daily profit to do spay/neuter surgeries on a day the clinic is normally closed (for example: \$800 for one clinic on a Sunday). Out of this payment, the veterinarian agrees to provide and pay the vet tech, and all the supplies and equipment needed for the day.

- The veterinarian should agree to do a minimum of 35 animals (except during the first clinic, when it's recommended to schedule only 20-25 animals). The payment to the vet and the number of surgeries performed determine the cost per animal. (for example: \$800/35 animals = \$22.85 per animal cost to the animal organization sponsoring the event) As the team and the veterinarian come up to speed in subsequent clinics, it will be possible to schedule more animals. At this point, the price per animal drops even lower.

A typical pricing structure could be \$25 per cat and \$35 per dog, averaging \$30 per animal. With 20-35 surgeries in a day, gross income for one clinic is about \$600 - \$1050.

2. Recruit and orient volunteers.

- Hold a volunteer orientation before the first clinic to review the flow of the day, supplies that will be needed, and who is responsible for what.
- Try to use only volunteers who have been trained discourage "show-ups."

3. Prepare forms you will use, and obtain supplies.

- Form should include intake sheets, releases, and after-care instructions.

4. Promote the clinic and schedule appointments.

- For the first clinic, don't book more than 20 - 25 animals. That gives time for the team to get used to the process. As the volunteers and veterinarian become more comfortable with the process, increase the number of appointments per clinic up to 35 per day, or more if feasible.
- Stagger the times that clients should arrive based on the vet's preference for starting with cats or dogs. (Example: cats from 8-9 am, dogs at 9:30.) Generally, plan to stagger intake over 1-1/2 to 2 hours, depending on the number of volunteers you have for check in and their experience with the process. Ruth Steinberger says, "We have one program where two people do the check in and getting animals into cages that is very high volume. They [schedule] people at 15-minute intervals over 2-1/2 hours. Check in is still done by 10 or 10:30 but it is not hectic."
- Remind clients to fast the pet the night before, and give directions to the clinic. Make reminder call the day before.

5. Hold the clinic.

- Help clients with forms if necessary. Review pick-up times with the client.
- If you are in an area where some clients are not able to read, be prepared to go over the paperwork with them verbally.
- Get pets into cages or carriers right away. Discourage people from allowing pets to "visit" other pets.
- Keep on hand some plastic quick ties to replace missing carrier bolts.
- Be sure each animal has its own intake form with the animal identified in some way (temporary collars for instance) that links the animal to their form. Also note any payment collected at that time. Label the carrier or cage with the owner's name.
 - For cats, write the owner's last name on a piece of masking tape that you place next to the paperwork (just one end sticking to the table top). Then, when you remove the cat from its cage before surgery, place the tape on the cat. Several cats may be out of their cages at the same time, so it's important to know for sure who's who.
 - When dealing with a litter of look-alike kittens, write each kitten's ID number (that corresponds to intake paperwork) on masking tape and put the masking tape on the kitten's head between its ears. This provides an ID that will last through the day. (Plus, it's really cute.)

- The vet techs and volunteers provide all prep and post-op services so the veterinarian is only doing surgery during the day. This is the most efficient way to utilize the veterinarian's time.
- At pick up, provide aftercare information in writing, but also review it verbally with each pet owner.
- Volunteers clean all the cages and areas that have been used for the In-Clinic Clinic during the day so the veterinarian has a clean workplace the next day.

Results

The Numbers

- A monthly clinic doing 35 surgeries per day for 12 months can sterilize 420 pets. In a rural community, with the program targeted toward low-income pet owners, this volume can have significant results.
- Many of the counties with in-clinic clinics don't have shelters, and it is hard to obtain statistics on animal populations in these areas. In Bristow, a town of 5000 people, the shelter used to kill 700-800 pets a year. Now that figure is under 100. This shelter's intake of litters was reduced by 90% through spay/neuter efforts.
- In other counties, people who are known to accept strays report receiving fewer calls since the program came to their county.

Critical Factors

Ruth Steinberger of Oklahoma Spay Network cites these factors as critical to the success of the In-Clinic Clinics:

- Teamwork and good volunteers to handle all non-vet tasks; try to make the veterinarian's job as easy as possible
- Good promotion possibly a weekly notice or column about pet care in a newspaper or shopping flyer that reaches the target population
- Anticipating no-shows. Reminders the day before help. Many spay/neuter clinics overbook by as much as 20% to allow for no-shows, but discuss this with your veterinarian because in rare cases everyone may show up!

Thinking Outside the Box

- Using the veterinary clinic facility when it is normally closed. Some people view mobile clinics as a veterinary clinic on wheels...the Oklahoma Spay Network views each private animal hospital as a mobile clinic that got stuck!
- Paying the vet more than the going rate, and still getting low prices per surgery. Veterinarians who participate in the In-Clinic Clinics every month can bring in several thousand dollars of revenue to their practice in the course of a year.
- In some areas, Network members put posters about the low-cost spay/neuter clinic in the bathrooms of bars that attract targeted pet owners.

How They Feel About What They Did

Everyone is thrilled to finally see significant progress in reducing the numbers of unwanted litters in their areas.

The veterinarians are generally skeptical at first. One veterinarian initially only agreed to do the In-Clinic Clinic one day, on the condition he never be asked again. At the end of the day he said "I don't know what I was thinking. These people aren't anyone's clients." He also said he had never been thanked by so many people, and then volunteered to do the In-Clinic Clinic monthly.

Ruth Steinberger reports that several vets who have worked the In-Clinic Clinics are now willing to discuss this program and the specifics of the vet's role, with vets in other states.

Their Next Steps

Oklahoma Spay Network received funding from PetSmart Charities to produce a DVD that instructs other groups on starting up an In-Clinic Clinic. They will use a vet clinic in Poteau, OK, to show the workings of an In-Clinic Clinic from check in through release.

Ruth Steinberger is also prepared to work long distance with groups in other states who want to start In-Clinic Clinics. She will pair up with an experienced In-Clinic Clinic vet to coach the participating group and its vets through the startup of the program.

Some Words of Wisdom

What Worked

Educating vets on the advantages and efficiency of In-Clinic Clinics for low-cost spay/neuter surgeries:

- The vet and medical staff are paid from the proceeds of the clinic, generating revenue instead of being an overall loss for the vet.
- Revenue is generated during off-hours; regular business is not affected.
- The cost to the practice is low because there is no use of their office staff for scheduling.
- The clinics provides a high volume of surgeries with a limited number (even one) of veterinarians.
- Extra surgeries can be scheduled to compensate for likely no-shows, and these no-shows do not represent a loss to anyone.

This works for veterinarian because:

- The isolated time block means the vet does not compete with him/herself for their regular workday hours.
- Low-income test means the vet is not competing with him/herself for their regular clients.
- New revenues and increased cash flow benefit the practice.

What Didn't

The typical approach to veterinarians is to ask them to do a few low-cost surgeries during their regular hours. The drawbacks to this approach are:

- Loss of revenue per surgery limits the numbers assisted
- Reduced cost surgeries may actually cost the animal hospital more due to extra phone calls for authorization, etc.
- No-shows represent a loss because of prior phone time for office staff

Be Prepared For

It's common for veterinarians to be concerned that In-Clinic Clinics will take business from regular practice. However, in targeting low-income pet owners, the clinics really do reach a different population. Typically, animals at the clinic have never received any vet care.

Oklahoma Spay Network found that veterinarians who were skeptical the first day turned out to be very pleased with the program. They appreciated the extra income, and also realized the animals they were seeing on low-income day were not from people who would be regular clients. One vet said "I met people today I never met before, and I've lived in this town my whole life!"

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 email to ASPCA® National Outreach with your feedback and questions.

Oklahoma Spay Network: In-Clinic Clinics: Thumbnail Sketch

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Staff

Oklahoma Spay Network, which coordinates spay/neuter efforts in several counties in southeastern Oklahoma, has one organizer for the region, paid through grants.

Business Type

Oklahoma Spay Network is a project of Homeward Bound Humane Society, which is a non-profit, 501(c)(3) organization.