

1999 Update: City of San Jose Spay/Neuter Voucher Program

By Karen Johnson  
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The City of San Jose continues to reduce the number of cats entering the shelter by funding a voucher program to spay and neuter cats. This program began in October, 1994, and despite temporarily running out of funds several times, has continued to this date. Vouchers are provided to citizens which allow them to have any owned or stray cat neutered or spayed for \$5. There is no limit to the number of cats someone can have altered, provided that only 8 vouchers can be issued at a time. The City reimburses the veterinarian for the surgery at \$10 per uncomplicated neuter and \$20 per spay. Additional payment is made for pregnant and lactating females or other complications of the surgery. For the Calendar Year 1999, the average fee paid to veterinarians was \$23.91 per cat, for a total cost of \$67,124.

Changes to the program since our last report in May, 1998, include reducing the \$5 fee to nothing if the cat is presented for altering prior to the age of 6 months of age, and is not pregnant, and dropping the requirement for owned cats to be licensed prior to receiving a voucher.

The voucher program continues to be run by part time volunteers at City Hall in less than 6 hours per week. Duties are primarily processing requests for applications and information, issuing vouchers, and processing the veterinarian billings for reimbursements.

The following table shows data from three periods of the program:

	10/94-4/96	CY97	CY99
Cats Altered	5600	1802	2807
% Ferals	19.5%	40%	18%*

Females	60.4%	61%	62%
Pregnant	4.4%	16%	13%
In Heat	4.0%	19%	12%

\*Only 4 of participating veterinarian offices bother to mark the box on the vouchers as to whether the cat is feral. Of those clinics, 18% of the surgeries were for ferals.

Of the 1725 females altered, 30% were early spays, as opposed to 39% of the males.

From 1984 until 1991, the average annual increase of incoming stray cats at HSSCV was 5.98% per year. The 1995 kitten season could not have been affected by the voucher program, as minimal vouchers were disbursed prior to March, 1995. Once the voucher program was implemented, and after another 11% increase in stray cats from San Jose for CY95, the City of San Jose stray cat intakes at the shelter decreased from 9394 in CY95 to 8441 in CY99. At the same time, the total number of surrendered cats also decreased, from 5508 in CY95 to 3770 in CY99. This breaks down to a drop of 10% for strays, and 32% for surrenders. This remarkable achievement can only be attributed to the voucher program, as there has been no other changes in animal regulations or enforcement in this time period.

If the San Jose annual stray cat intakes had continued increasing at HSSCV by its historical 5.98% per year, the 9394 cats in CY95 should have increased to 11,851 cats for CY99, instead of the 8,441 actually handled. Approximately 50% of the strays arrive at the shelter via animal control. The cost to the City for shelter services is \$80. for each stray animals brought into the shelter by the public, and \$126. for strays brought in by Animal Control, for an average of \$103. each. At \$103. per stray cat handled, this voucher program has saved San Jose over \$351,000. in shelter costs for CY99 alone. Voucher funding for FY00 is \$65,000. When one looks at what the stray San Jose cat numbers would have been without the voucher program, the program has achieved a 28% reduction in stray cats over 5 years,

saved many hundreds of thousands of dollars, plus reduced the number of animals which are euthanized.

While the City of San Jose does not pay HSSCV to handle surrendered cats, HSSCV also has benefited from the 2014 fewer surrendered cats handled this year as compared to 1994. Using the \$80. figure for the cost of handling a surrendered cat at the shelter, this is over \$161,000. the shelter has not had to raise to care for these cats in 1999 alone.

The County of Santa Clara has also instituted a voucher program for stray and feral cats. The program was funded in 7/98, with surgeries starting in 1/99. As of 3/31/00, year to date comparisons with 3/31/99, show a 16.7% decrease in the number of stray cats handled at the county shelter, and a 25% reduction in the number of surrendered cats turned into the shelter. Total cats handled at the County shelter had increased by an average of 7.1% every year from 1994 to 1998. FY99 should have had 1704 cats handled, and instead had only 1274. There is a target of 1700 strays to be altered under the county program by 7/1/00.

This drop in cats cannot be attributed to this voucher program, however, as a new organization by the name of Town Cats has begun aggressively taking in strays and surrenders in the South County for adoption to new homes. They have ongoing adoption fairs at various Petco's throughout the area. Town Cats placed 604 cats and kittens in 1998, as well as neutering 100 ferals. In the year 1999, Town Cats placed 936 cats and kittens into homes, and altered about 200 feral cats. Most of the placed kittens were the tamed offspring of feral cats. Roughly 40% of the adult cats were owner surrenders on the way to the shelter, 30% were adults taken from the county shelter, and 30% were strays or pets. Additionally, Town Cats paid for the surgeries of 50 cats belonging to low income households, as well as drove the cats to and from the clinic for the altering.

Between the voucher program and Town Cats, we should expect to see dramatic drops in the South County animals handled within a year or two.

There is no equivalent program for dogs for either the city or county. The City of San Jose did offer dog vouchers for a short time in 1995, but it proved to be costly for the benefit received at the shelter, and not popular with the public. For comparison with cats, the number of dogs handled in 1995 was 1526, and in 1999 was 1661, a 9% increase at the county shelter. At HSSCV in 1995, there were 10,108 dogs handled, and in 1999 it had dropped to 8988, for a decrease of 11%.

It is obvious by now that the spay/neuter voucher program for cats has had a dramatic effect on the cat populations in the City of San Jose. For further reductions, we recommend not only a continuation of the funding for the programs, but also increased publicity to make the public aware of the vouchers, coupled with instruction as to how to catch strays and ferals to get them in for surgery. Households needs to be aware that if they are feeding a stray cat, they should also catch it and have it altered.

This is the third update on the San Jose voucher program. To view the first two reports, see:

- \* City of San Jose Spay/Neuter Voucher Program
- \* 1997 Update: Do Spay/Neuter Vouchers Work?

See also the pet demographic study in Santa Clara County at:

- A Survey of Changes in HSSCV Shelter Population from 1994 to 1996: Do free spay/neuter vouchers work?

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