

The Linacre Project 2010 – 2011 final report

Aims

- To implement an intensive, on the ground neuter program for cats in the community within the postcode of Liverpool 20, an area that is acknowledged in all government statistics to be the most deprived in Sefton. Analysis of the charity's data indicated this one area alone previously had accounted for over 17% of our neutering expenditure
- To forge meaningful links with other community groups working within the postcode through which the scheme could be pushed
- To collect and assess data on both participating households and individual feline welfare to allow patterns to be assessed as well as guiding future plans
- To draw up a list of factors from the data that would act as indices to allow the charity to assess impact of the scheme

Methods

- Funding to the tune of £16,821 was obtained that it was hoped would pay for 400 cats to be neutered within Liverpool 20. The charity was able to neuter 376 cats with this sum, total expenditure per cat for the project working out at £44.73

Income	charity
1000	Jean Marchig
5000	Jean Sainsbury
6382	Persula
4439	Freshfields
16,821	Total
Expenditure	
Print bill	£170.40
House to house delivery	£305.50
Wage	£3964
Direct neuter bill	£10,382.06
Vet extras [worm, flea etc]	£1999.94
Totals	£16,821.90

- Contact was established with a large number of existing community groups through the offices of Sefton Council for Voluntary Services already working with families, debt issues, advice provision, community support and social housing providers. All were provided with an outline of the project, its funders and three channels to register cats for the project. Many chose to publish the project on their websites and we asked all community groups to ensure all their staff were aware of the opportunity
- Leaflets were distributed house to house across the entire postcode by a third party at the start of the project. The charity was unhappy with the feedback from this option as well as the poor response to the initiative and would not consider repeating it

- All public service outlets were given publicity material on the project that the public could access, including libraries, social service offices, meeting rooms, churches and other animal welfare bodies like the PDSA, dog wardens and RSPCA inspectorate
- The charity ran a waiting list for the period once cats were registered, starting the first neuters during the last week of July 2010 and only finishing on the 1st Sep 2011
- Rufford Veterinary Group handled all the neuters professionally with good feedback between the charity and the vets

Findings

- External neuters for the community in the whole of Merseyside 2010 to 2011 have amounted to 1796 to the end of August this year, this figure includes both directly owned cats and what we term street/feral cats “adopted” by individual households. L20 cats amounted to 23% of this total, 418 [of which 376 fell within the Linacre Project time boundary]. Other equally deprived areas like Liverpool 4 saw 142 cats neutered [7.9%] and Liverpool 21 116 cats [6.4%]
- Due to the exposure the project received that crossed postcode boundaries the charity was inundated with requests for help in other neighbouring postcodes to L20, these were paid for out of the Cats Protection neuter budget
- The project started with a number of opinions it regarded as fact. There was a huge demand from within the area. That proved to be so.
- It felt that a survey of the physical well-being of each household cat should be undertaken because it expected to find animals in poor condition. This proved to be entirely wrong and very few cats gave cause for concern and indeed this information has only been collated on half of the group as it was felt other household info was more pertinent. 5 unneutered cats had bite wounds, 1 was referred to the PDSA for dental surgery, 12 had dermatitis and 2 had long standing conjunctivitis. Weights of cats were rarely outside the norm, although it should be noted that 43.6 % had to be defleaed and 40.9% were wormed
- It was felt from the outset that large groups of unneutered cats would clearly present serious community issues [noise, fighting, smell, dirt etc] The follow up household survey conducted by a final year student at John Moores University threw up some surprising figures that did not back this assertion which again has invited us to restructure the project’s data collation
- The household survey conducted by phone on only the first 173 cats done on this scheme because the research had to be finished by Feb was responded to by 43% of households [76 households]. Amongst the findings
- Only 28% said they would have been able to transport the cat to the clinic, vehicle ownership is low within the community. Interestingly this is a statistic cropping up in other deprived areas that until the charity started collating data had never really featured in our projections. 68% of neuters from Southport were transported by the households themselves but only 12.5% of cats from Liverpool 4 were transported by the household. There is only one clinic in L4 and none in L20. Marginal areas that do not attract service investment doubles the chances of poor vet access and hence neuter. Southport has 5 clinics.
- Asked whether the family would now feel more able to keep the pet for life 65% said it made no difference
- Only 30% felt their unneutered cats were a problem to their neighbours
- Only 51% of families stated there was less smell after neuter in the household
- Only 40% stated there was less anti social activity from other cats after neutering
- 68% felt the cat was more settled at home, but only 50 % felt the cat spent more time at home
- Over 90% of households cited expense as the sole reason for not neutering their cat
- Because the follow up phone survey results on the first half of households contradicted initial projections it forced a rethink on what data could be used as indices for both dire need as well as how one can measure impact of a scheme over a period of time. The charity has therefore collated data in 9 categories that it feels cumulatively can be regarded as a benchmark for progress. The project has also looked at

figures for all these 9 categories in two other postcodes, Southport [PR8 and PR9] which is relatively wealthy and L4 which is one of the poorest areas within Liverpool City boundaries

a. Male : female ratio

L20	M=43.8%	F=56.2%
PR8-9	M=41%	F=59%
L4	M=48.9%	F=51.1%

One would expect the female percentage to decrease annually as the neutering took hold. There is still a strong resistance to sterilising males both in dogs and cats particularly from men.

b. Age at neuter by sex

L20	M= 1.5	F=1.38
PR8-9	M=1.3	F=0.9
L4	M=1.8	F=1.4
Rehoming	M=0.8	F=0.87

The younger the age of neuter the less chance for breeding. Generally recognised as needing to neuter before the first season at 5 months, there is a clear need to be able to reduce age at neuter considerably. For both L4 and L20 it would have been feasible for these cats to have bred twice. The average age of neuter for all admitted cats that are rehomed is included. This should be the norm

c. % of females pregnant or in season

L20	28.4%
PR8-9	33%
L4	38.7%

Another reflection on the late age at point of neuter, reducing percentage means less breeding and a more accepting attitude to the notion of neuter

d. % of cats from dysfunctional houses

L20	11.1%
PR8-9	0
L4	18.7%

Dysfunctional here indicates problems with alcohol, drugs and/or hygiene. Often these houses are multi-cat and quite chaotic houses generally with multi-agency needs. Accessing them and gaining co-operation can be challenging. The charity works on the principle of leaving the adult cats in what is often a poor environment but which will reduce the likelihood of acquiring further animals and then breeding again. Post neuter visits have affirmed this to be the case in most circumstances

e. Litters admitted by postcode to the rescue by %

L20	2009	2010
	15.8%	11.4%
PR8-9	2009	2010 7%
	4.8%	

Reducing the L20 intake of kittens and pregnant cats is clearly a mark of impact, 2011 is expected to be lower still

f. % females already had litter at point of neuter
Number of litters from females done

L20	40.75%	1.9
PR8-9	33%	1.3
L4	24.4%	1.58

A disturbingly large number of females here have already been bred reflecting the absence of advice, opportunity and access. This figure must come down over time

g. % owned cats neutered : % street cats neutered

L20	Own 64.3%	Street 35.7%
PR8-9	Own 61%	Street 39%
L4	Own 65.2%	Street 34.8%

A surprisingly similar set of figures possibly reflecting the ratio of owned to stray/feral cats? These figures are important when we get to where households acquire their cats in L20

h. % cats from households with three or more cats

L20	37.2%
PR8-9	32%
L4	44.7%

This surprising figure ignores logic in a deprived area where resources are tight. Not neutering means a household ends up with several generations of cats. Neutered cat households stay at the normal one or two cats. Because households lack guidance, advice or direct access to a scheme, the problem multiplies. Here is a percentage expected to decline over several years of neutering

i. % adults admitted to the charity unneutered by year

L20	2009 14.5%	2010 10.5%
PR8-9	2009 4.8%	2010 7%
L4	2009 8.7%	2010 16.6%

A clear indicator of too little neutering that the project should tackle. The drop from 2009 in L20 would be expected to drop further in 2011

- Midway through the project in discussions with the vet clinic Rufford it was decided to switch the way all neuters were stitched after a series of cats placed back in the home developed problems. Intradermal stitching was introduced, a measure that some of our other clinics involved in other neuter projects were using successfully. This meant that there was no longer a stitch knot for the cat to obsess about, maul with and indeed remove, it also meant we no longer used surgical collars

on the cat, which reduced the stress factor for the animal. Instead we agreed to put an extra 50 pence on the neuter bill to cover the high cost of the glue used. In total 2 cats died post surgery [only one of which was neutered by Rufford vets], 5 were restitched and 3 were stapled. Since the switch to intradermal stitching only one cat has given rise to problems. It should be stated here that in many respects the real problem lay in the poor after care provided in the home where supervision was minimal, advice was ignored, too much space was allowed to the cat immediately after surgery so that wear and tear on the surgery site was too great. All 5 clinics the charity uses for neuters now use the intradermal method of stitching

- It cannot be stressed how surprising the charity found the almost complete lack of existing contact households in L20 had with other animal health professionals. Only 1 cat was microchipped of the 367, only 7 had any vaccinations [and therefore had visited a vet outside the postcode], only 8 households had a cat flap [the charity strongly recommends cat flaps to all potential adoptees visiting the shelter], only 16.7% of cats had visited the local pdsa clinic on the edge of L20. Of the 67 litters accounted for prior to neuter, 14.9% died, 52.2% went to family members or friends and only one litter was sent to a welfare charity
- Another misconception proved wrong by the data collection was the involvement of pet shops. The charity was sure that the figures would show an alarming number of cats acquired from pet shops. There are 3, all outside the postcode and licensed by the city council to sell kittens. In fact 9.8% were acquired in this way, compared to 46.5% acquired from family, friends and neighbours. The charity was also surprised at the figure of 32.1% who stated they acquired or adopted their cat from the street, frequently as kittens from feral colonies or who initially came for food and slowly formed a bond with the householder over time. Many cats like this ended up finding a home with a family who never really wished for pets but felt obliged to respond to a situation. Incidentally only 2 of the 367 cats came from recognised welfare charities as formal adoptions
- Only 10.6% of the cats came from working households not in receipt of benefits and these were exclusively feral cats breeding. 337 came from households on working tax credits, unemployment benefits, pension or disability allowance
- 49.5% of the cats were living in social housing. The vast majority of householders 46% had been referred on by other community groups signposting the project. Friends and neighbours who had already accessed the scheme or whose family knew of the project accounted for a further 25.7%, interestingly only 2 households came to the project directly via the charity's website reinforcing the chasm between the communities in areas like this and welfare professionals

Conclusions

- The charity correctly saw a real need for an intensive blanket neuter program within the postcode
- Its modus operandi was proved to be essential. All the data indicates a clear lack of advice, guidance, contact of any kind with vet health professionals. Only the pdsa operate on the ground, there are no private vet clinics, there is clear evidence that whole communities are by passed unwittingly until a project like this is taken into the community as a whole. Not surprisingly the community then responds positively
- It is indeed unfortunate that where social deprivation is so endemic, cat neutering is at the bottom of the heap. There is no way round this other than to make provision for it. The charity has always believed that animal ownership should be universal, but there needs to be provision and support
- It is clear that because there has been too little intervention by the third sector [this charity has been working on the ground within L20 for 5 years but with too little resourcing] there are too many felines within the postcode. The excessive breeding supplies households within the community, the street's excess further adds to household pet ownership, in all of this there is never the opportunity to encounter a structured pet adopting entity like the RSPCA or Cats Protection shelter outside the postcode and then be guided, to have input into the needs of cat ownership. The community as a whole knows little else but to continue the cycle of breeding. Supply within the

community has outstripped demand. Intervention like this is crucial to breaking that cycle for the future

- That the project must continue on the ground over a number of years is clear. That the modus operandi of the project needs to be applied in other equally deprived wards is also clear. As the charity has made clear in its application for funding this project in its second year it is proposed to scale the level of neuter down to approx 100 in Liverpool 20 over the next year, depending on demand, as well as also taking this approach into L4, L11, L21 and L30 and begin work on individual estates after September, with a proposed target of 250 cats. This will be the phase 2 of the Linacre Project with the aim of neutering a total of 350 cats and we ask that our funders continue their support
- It is crucial that the charity continues to collate data that can be analysed annually to guide its approach

Acknowledgements

Thanks are due to the 3 main funders of this scheme without whom it would never have started, Jean Sainsbury Trust, Persula Foundation and Jean Marchig Fund. We are grateful to Rufford vet clinic for their patience and being so accommodating and lastly Becky McWilliams from John Moores University who inputted a lot of the data and took care of the follow-up assessments