

## **Cat Intake Practices at DACC Alternatives to Impoundment**

DACC has adopted nationally recognized best practices regarding the admission of cats, with the goal of reducing euthanasia and the separation of cats from families who love and care for them, allowing healthy cats to remain in the areas where they are thriving.

The Los Angeles County Department of Animal Care and Control (DACC) has adopted nationally recognized best practices regarding the admission of cats, with the goal of reducing euthanasia. Historically, cats have fared poorly in animal shelters both at DACC around the country. The redemption rate where owners reclaim their lost cats is miniscule – less than two percent of stray cats at DACC are reclaimed by their owners. Many healthy stray cats were euthanized because they were feral and unadoptable. While thriving in the location where they were living, their impoundment at an animal care center provided no live option for their release. Their impoundment was really more in line with “pest control” than saving and rehoming cats.

Because of these poor options and results, in 2020 DACC reevaluated how to best meet the needs of its communities and free-roaming cats. We did this in consultation with veterinarians that specialize in animal shelter medicine at the UC Davis Koret Shelter medicine program as well as leading animal welfare organizations around the country. From this, our Alternatives to Impoundment (ATI) program was developed.

Under ATI, healthy cats with no signs of illness or injury and without owner identification are encouraged to be kept in place where they are found. Impounding healthy cats in animal care centers causes them fear, anxiety, and stress. These conditions challenge the cats’ immune systems and the cats often develop upper respiratory infections or other illnesses. Healthy free-roaming cats are generally deferred from care center admission because they are thriving in their current environment. Many free-roaming cats have a human family and vary their time between the home and outdoors. Other times, a home or group of homes is providing food and water to unowned neighborhood cats. These cats have established themselves as part of their neighborhood and do not need care center assistance. Bringing these cats to a care center removes them from their home territories, and caregivers generally don’t look for them at care centers for many days or weeks, if ever, contributing to the abysmal redemption rate. Prior to ATI at DACC, approximately 50 percent of cats admitted to the care centers were euthanized. That number has dropped to 31 percent because healthy free-roaming cats can remain where they live and thrive.

Deferring healthy stray cats provides better options for them to return to their home or group of homes that care for them. The further a cat is removed from its home location, the lower the chances are that it will be reclaimed by its owner. Cats are more than 10x more likely to return home when they are left where they are. A study on this can be found here: [Frequency of Lost Dogs and Cats in the United States and the Methods Used to Locate Them - PubMed \(nih.gov\)](#). -

Kittens have also been especially challenged when brought into animal care centers. In the past, unweaned kittens separated from their mothers also fared very poorly at animal care centers. Unable to eat without assistance, and DACC not having the resources to feed kittens every few hours around the clock, meant these kittens would be euthanized. Additionally, kittens separated from their mothers also experience increased illness and have higher mortality rates in comparison to being raised by their mothers in their natural environment.

To address this, DACC developed the “*Got Kittens?*” campaign in which we ask the community to leave unweaned kittens with their mothers and observe them over time to make certain they are thriving. If there is no mother available, DACC provides foster care supplies for volunteers to raise the kittens in their own homes, where the kittens will not be exposed to adult cat diseases, until they are old enough for adoption. Leaving kittens with their mothers in their home environment (under supervision) until they are weaned sets the kittens up for better success in placement. By educating the public about identifying whether kittens are truly abandoned by their mother and in need of immediate assistance, more kittens can remain with their mothers during the critical nursing stage until weaned. This approach is healthier for kittens and improves their chance to later be successfully adopted. If the kittens have actually been abandoned by their mother DACC provides education, fostering supplies, and veterinary care for community members who enjoy caring for them until they are old enough for adoption through DACC or other resources. Underage kittens admitted to ACCs without their mothers are in fact the most common reason for animal euthanasia. DACC is meeting community goals of lifesaving by preventing the unnecessary admission of kittens to its ACCs and expanding its volunteer foster program.

Any cats or kittens that are malnourished, ill, injured, or require other assistance are welcomed at DACC so they can receive the care they need.

Further, studies have shown that removal of unowned community cats leads to destabilization of the local population leading to more kittens and cats moving into the area. This was found in a study conducted in Tasmania ([CSIRO PUBLISHING | Wildlife Research](#)). Current recommendations are to instead work on deterrents if a property owner does not want cats spending time in a specific area and increasing spay and neuter efforts to manage the cat population long term.

Here are some informative articles written by university shelter medicine experts that explains managing cat intake:

[New-Paradigms-for-Shelters-and-Community-Cats.pdf \(ufl.edu\)](#)

[Million Cat Challenge | Managed Admission](#)

TED talk by Dr. Kate Hurley: [How we saved over 3.4 million shelter cats - YouTube](#)

The National Animal Care & Control Association position statement on free roaming cats can also be found here: [Animal Control Intake of Free-Roaming Cats | National Animal Care & Control Association \(nacenet.org\)](#)

DACC is also exploring opportunities to expand low-cost spay/neuter services for cats to prevent the birth of unwanted kittens. In 2021, DACC piloted the successful Purrfect Fix cat spay/neuter event at the Lancaster ACC, where 45 community cats were sterilized and has continued to provide community pet sterilization opportunities to reduce the number of unwanted animal births.

DACC has found that many community members, given the appropriate training and resources, would like to retain their pet, help a lost pet find its way home, or prevent unnecessary euthanasia of healthy, adult cats and underage kittens. By viewing the community as an extension of DACC, the collaboration benefits vulnerable animals, is more rewarding for the people who care about them and increases DACC's capacity to provide services to those animals with no other options than to be admitted into care. ACCs serve as community resource centers by aligning animals and owners in need with the resources they need, when they need them.

At DACC we have pivoted to increase our resources to help support community members and their neighborhood furry friends. We offer deterrents, the good neighbor cat spay and neuter clinics, and a finder foster program for underage kittens found without a mother. Our goal is to be partners with our local communities and become a resource center. We recognize that community engagement is key to the success of a managed intake approach. We need help from caring constituents such as yourself to work with us to give the best possible outcome for these community cats. We hope that this helps clarify your questions.