

Testimonials and Articles

How the Task Force mission improves the lives of cats: vignettes

1. Little eight-year-old Kristi Doney of the Gros Ventre Indian Tribe, with the help of a doting and patient father, brought three female cats to the Fort Belknap Indian Community Pet Care Week clinic, July 2000. The cats were boxed in pet carriers donated by HSUS so that the volunteer who invited Kristi to stay and help could not see them. Kristi was just too shy to stay, but she was willing to walk back to the cat waiting, surgery, and recovery areas to deliver her cats. "Oh," said the father, "seeing all the kittens. "I didn't know you do kittens." He looked at Kristi. "We have ten kittens at home," she admitted. She was encouraged to go home and get them. Taking carrying boxes and surgical forms to sign in, she left with Father. This was serious business. Back they came with all ten kittens, but still Kristi could not bring herself to stay with strangers and help with the cats. But one more adult female at home still was not caught. Home they went to try once more. Not long after, the volunteer felt a tug on her shirt tail. Kristi, beaming, had the last cat. This time, she stayed for the rest of the day helping to recover cats.
2. A woman brought forty-eight cats to the Salish and Kootenai Love Your Pets Week clinic in the Flathead Nation. All the cats and kittens were socialized, clean, carefully boxed, and identified. They lived in an old house she gave them on her ranch. Many of the kittens and young adults were adopted by volunteers and pet owners with local references.
3. Montana State Prison Feral Cat Day and Montana State (Mental) Hospital Feral Day: there was great resistance among administrators against a TNR approach to the ferals on their grounds. With the publicity, education, doing all the cats at once, community and staff support, "those" cats became "our" cats, and support for TNR is now strong in both institutions.
4. After the Montana State Prison event in Deer Lodge, a volunteer returned home to find on her answering machine this message : "Hello, I'm looking for (her name which he must have read in pre-event news articles and located in the telephone book) "and I just want you to know I just want just take care of those cats! I used to be in Deer Lodge (the prison) and those cats are cool!" A lesson that is directed toward the very roots of violence.
5. Northern Cheyenne comment found on Task Force exit questionnaire, "How was this spay/neuter clinic of benefit to you?" "It helped me have more care of animals."
6. The Task Force made two annual visits to Lodge Grass in the Crow Nation. The little town never saw any cats until the roving dog population was so reduced that "one could hardly find a dog" on the streets. "Now the cats can venture out", reports Mayor Daryl Bends and one of only two paid town staff, Johnny Castro. "People are still talking about Valley of the Chiefs Pet Care Week and showing more concern for the animals."
7. A helping Salish and Kootenai Housing Authority worker and Kootenai tribal member observed after the 1998 clinic: "I used to hate my dog. She was always having puppies. My cat, too. Now my dog's by my feet watching television and my cat is in my lap."

Articles:

The following article was the cover story for the Winter 2000 issue of The Latham Letter. To download the pdf of this entire article, including the photographs and graphs, [click here](#). Scroll down to the heading "Medical and Scientific", then click on "A Lesson in Changing Attitude, Winter, 2000."

A Lesson in Changing Attitude: The Montana Spay and Neuter Task Force

by Jean Atthowe

This report is a lesson in how to change attitudes. Evidence indicates that education is a complex operation, not neat, squeaky clean, or looking overtly as efficient as a scientist's laboratory or, for that matter, the average veterinary clinic. For you, the reader, this report encompasses a puzzle that you will be asked to put together to find the answer and the real story.

History

The Montana Spay/Neuter Task Force mobile service S.P.O.T. (Stop Pet Overpopulation Today) was launched by invitation of the Blackfeet Nation at Browning, Montana in November 1996. The First Annual Blackfeet Pet Care Week featured, as its centerpiece, a free, demonstration spay / neuter clinic using one surgery table in a makeshift space in Pete Berger's heated and enclosed garage. Pete Berger had been assigned the task of instituting Blackfeet Animal Care / Control. Blackfeet Country was infamous for its roving bands of dogs, fighting dogs, biting dogs, starving, sick and mangy dogs. You could not look anywhere without seeing at least one of these unfortunate dogs. By May of the following year, with the clinic, a low cost certificate program, and collection and destruction of the sick dogs, one hardly could find a dog wandering the streets of Browning, the Nation's capital. If one did find a dog, it was fed, healthy, and wearing an animal control license tag.

Since then, in the past three years, the Task Force has helped create events, at the invitation of local councils and groups, in six of the seven Native American nations in Montana, and twenty-three events altogether throughout Montana in rural towns as well as the Nations. These occasions are called "events", not spay / neuter clinics, because the mission is to help locals regain the ancient respect for their dogs and cats, pull together their own resources to help create the event and, by owning the solution, become empowered to continue providing the solution. In the case of the Task Force, the public apathy regarding the overwhelming pet overpopulation and resultant killing of healthy, adoptable cats and dogs is the problem addressed. The approach of the Task Force in these communities is to reach the people through their own culture, Native American, rural ranch, and logging communities. It is working on educational materials that do so. The Task Force carries in a small van all the supplies and equipment to set up a spay / neuter clinic in an existing building, helps with publicity, educational materials, locates veterinarians and volunteers and is in charge of the events. The host community finds a building - a school, firehouse, community center, empty tribal housing, for example. They find donations of food to feed the volunteers, arrange with the schools for Task Force volunteers to teach, find housing for the out of town volunteers and veterinarians, even find donated laundry facilities for the huge amounts of soiled bedding created at the clinics. Many communities donate the services of their paid employees, as well as finding volunteers. Most welcome are the children of the community, pet owners of all ages, and town leaders. The clinics themselves are an education not only for volunteers and pet owners but for the more than 45 veterinarians who have come from all over Montana and from as far away as Slovakia in Europe and the four corners of the United States, and who share, teach and learn from each other and perfect their skills in spay / neuter.

The Task Force now often runs six surgery tables and has provided surgery on its record day for 251 cats and dogs. In the past three years the Task Force has provided free surgeries for 5,500 cats and dogs at a cost of \$65,000 counting only supplies, or \$85,000 counting fixed items such as the van, surgery tables, and the like. Some of the impact of its visits are evidenced in statistical graphs and in letters accompanying this report.

But the numbers are not the big story: It's the attitude!

Encouraged to write her "Impressions of the First Annual Fort Peck Pet Care Week" in July 1999, Kali Lien, of Wolf Point, Montana, and volunteer and coordinator of the four day event created for the Fort Peck Tribes, home of Sioux and Assiniboine peoples, wrote the following:

"Something very beautiful happened here the last week in July that I still can't totally figure out. It was like all of our hearts were open wide, giving and receiving something we all need. My conclusion is that it was love. Love for each other and for all the animals. It appeared to be total chaos to someone who walked in the door to the demonstration free spay / neuter clinic, but it couldn't have been to have spayed and neutered that many animals. Everything we needed we received. The town became one big family like it was when I was a kid.

My initial goal was to help the animals, which we did, but what happened was something totally unexpected and was left in our hearts. A goodness that affected each person which will affect the town, which will affect the world. To me it is one of the first steps in making this a better world. It made my heart smile to see everyone together, to see people without any self confidence jumping in and being responsible for a certain job. You could just tell how good it made them feel. And the people (who probably wouldn't be caught dead with a lot of these people) were sitting on the floor with their recovering dogs in the middle of everyone else.

And the kids - they were made to feel so important. They had jobs, too. Four of them even asked if they could ride with me to the next clinic, the next day, in the next town. I told them I would make sure they got there and they did. I know that it will affect them the rest of their lives. One of the mothers told me she couldn't believe he got up that early to go.

Jean Atthowe of the Task Force told me that I would get to know a lot of the people from the Task Force very well by the end of the week. Well, she was right. What beautiful people they are! I made so many new friends, from my town and the Task Force.

Due to a change in clinic location, the second day we were without food for lunch and supper for the hundreds of volunteers that helped over the four days. The previous night I called someone at the Chamber of Commerce at 9:00 p.m. She called around, called me back and said they'd have something there for lunch, which they did. At 9:00 a.m. the morning of the "no-food-day" we went around and got donations from a few people, went to Subs and Such and he donated some food for lunch. Beth at the Sherman Motel threw together a big salad. For supper we went to the Pizza Place. Stephanie, the manager, suggested lasagna, salad and vegetable pizza. She donated the lasagna. Just like that lunch and supper were there."

What are the Elements Needed to Change Attitude and Behavior?

A goal of the Task Force is to bring about a change in attitude that will thus bring a change in behavior through respecting animals and then other living creatures including members of their family, school classes and community. Lorin Linder, Ph.D., of Psychologists for the Ethical Treatment of Animals starts her talks with a question: Does changing behavior change attitudes? Sounds logical, but think about people whose taxes are raised. They pay the increase, but do they change their attitude about taxes?

A sizable body of literature has been accumulated in the fields of market research and social psychology about changing attitude and behavior. We now know through numerous studies that the old idea that knowing (cognitive change) leads to attitude change which leads to long-term behavior change is simplistic. The process is much more complex. The following must be present to change attitudes and thus changes in behavior: As readers scan the following lists, they are asked to remember Kalie Lien's letter.

Elements of a persuasive message:

A persuasive message has the most impact if it contains the following elements:

1. It comes from multiple sources of high credibility. (Power, trust, expertise, similarity)
2. It is repeated often and consistently.
3. It is a multiple media message at accessible times and locations.
4. It is accompanied by a high level of personal involvement with the issue and is consistent with related attitude and value structure.
5. It has a high level of social support or acceptance in the receiver's environment.
6. It affords opportunities to give expression to the newly formed attitudes (i.e. to act) and ongoing reinforcement for doing so.

Factors needed to contribute to long-term behavior change:

1. It must target specific behaviors to be changed.
2. Address or create a desire to change: target people with the desire, or motivate the desire.
3. Provide multiple alternative behaviors to replace the old behavior.
4. Show concern for making the social environment supportive.

Mass media programs that were successful in effecting behavioral change did the following:

1. Incorporate information pertaining to behavioral alternatives and skills development within the message itself.
2. Provide positive interaction with receiver of the message.
3. Supplemented a mass communication-type message with a face-to-face follow up.
4. Mobilized community resources to make alternatives more easily available.

We find in Kali Lien's "Impressions" that elements needed to change attitudes and effect change include:

(1) Multiple sources of high credibility. "All our hearts were open wide" including Wolf Point's Chief of Police and his police, the volunteer Fire Chief (who swept and cleaned the fire hall where the clinic was held each night) and fellow volunteer firemen, business leaders, restaurant and other food suppliers, Soroptemists, Chamber of Commerce, Lions Club, Tribal Council members, teachers, and neighbors.

(2) Message was repeated often and consistently over a four day period with media and flyers announcing weeks before, follow up reporting by the media,

(3) Message sent by multiple media at accessible times and locations included radio, newspaper, flyers, in schools, word of mouth, locating the mothers of kittens and puppies brought to the event, door to door visiting in rural areas, offers to give pets rides to and from the fire station, and a fire station located in the center of town,

(4) Accompanied by a high level of personal involvement included long days for volunteers children as

well, handling animals, assisting with sterilizing instruments, donors of goods, recruiting volunteers from owners who brought pets, and all the community members mentioned above,

(5) Promote positive interaction through the work with and change in the animals, the whole community focused on animal care and awareness,

(6) Incorporated skills development with sensitivity to animal, social interaction, empowerment (that the one is valued, that one's pet is valued),

(7) Promote positive interaction with animals, with neighbors, with family, with role models and leaders in the community,

(8) Supplement with face to face follow up with community and animals through volunteering and donating,

(9) Mobilize community resources to work together in promoting alternatives that are more readily available through all the elements brought together by the Community and the Montana Spay / Neuter Task Force.

It is a universal given in the field of psychology that few people consistently change their behavior because most people doubt that their behavior will exert a major influence.

After coordinating and volunteering in a Montana Spay / Neuter Task Force Pet Care Event, Kali Lien identified in her own way the elements that research has discovered must be present to change attitudes and effect long-term behavioral change. She observed that people can, through change, exert a major influence. She saw "a goodness that affected each person which will affect the town, which will affect the world. It was one of the first steps in making this a better world."

From the Words of Others:

Kenny Shields, Director of Archives, Fort Peck Sioux and Assiniboine Tribes and great great grandson of Feather Earring, who fought at the Battle of the Little Big Horn:

"You impressed me with your work. The pet care week was also impressive, with how the medical people conducted themselves, very professional and above all courteous.

Elroy (his dog) is more of a friend than animal now (since he was neutered during the pet care week.) Before he used to chase cars and lie around outside the house all day long. Now you can't seem to keep him still. He likes to explore and bring things home. His appetite is good and he has gained weight, but I think it's muscle. Elroy comes in the house now to show what he brings home and puts it at your feet so you can inspect it. And sometimes it's the most comical things, like the dinosaur and the kangaroo. His favorites. Other times he will bring a plastic soda bottle for you to throw so he can "play fetch". It's a real delight to have him with us.

Let me tell you how we got him. A little over a year ago my wife went outside to hang out clothes. While in back of the house she saw this scraggily little dog crouched by the house. His eyes were gummy, his bones stuck out, and he had an odor about him. Thinking nothing of him she came in and forgot about it. But days passed and she found that it was still milling about outside. Since our neighbors had pups she thought he was one of theirs. After asking and confirming that he wasn't theirs, she started feeding him. He was slow in growing at first but soon he began to length. His coat used to be dull, but after nutritious feeding he became shiny. He was still inactive but he grew to like chasing cars. Probably learned it from his friends. They were mongrels. Finally, after hearing of the pet care clinic, we decided Elroy was a good

candidate. The rest is history. He is more passive and friendly and likes to play above all. This is completely different from other dogs we've had and enjoyed. Elroy is special.

Again, your staff was very professional and caring. Never before had such commitment been to such an endeavor as the one you set up. And the invite still stands. "Come back!"

Ilene Standen, volunteer at Fort Peck Tribes Pet Care event:

"Just a quick note to tell you that I very much enjoyed the Spay / Neuter clinic which was conducted here in Poplar this summer. I enjoyed working with the animals and I learned a lot about handling them.

Please be sure to include me in the next one. Just let me know when it will be. I think it is an extremely valuable service and one which I have been encouraging people to do for many years.

I think that when people here fully comprehend what good has been done, the next spay / neuter clinic will be even bigger.

Ben Speakthunder, Vice President, Fort Belknap Indian Community Council:

"Thank you for assisting us in our community during Fort Belknap's Pet Care Week. Your visit with your staff left a lasting impression on all of Fort Belknap. We are now aware of the importance of spaying and neutering mission."

Joel Dubose, rural community civic leader, Pinesdale, Montana:

"Having been a long-term resident of the Bitterroot Valley, specifically a small community of about 950 persons, I wish to go "on record" as to the enormous benefit that the Task Force has contributed to my community.

Typical of virtually every small community in Western Montana, we have had a history of livestock being chased and mutilated by strays and/or uncontrolled domestic animals. The stock owner retaliates with deadly force - usually with either poisons or 22 caliber shells. Fear races through the community as invariably a few family pets, guilty or not alike, end up in a ditch with several other killed animals. Lawsuits are threatened, mistrust abounds and harmony is nowhere to be found. (May I add that this endless cycle of violence was repeated in Texas where I lived years ago - so it is my perception that this is the reality of how rural America deals with pet overpopulation and lack of ownership responsibility.)

Enter the Montana Spay / Neuter Task Force. The situation takes on an entirely new perception. Children are taught to love and care for their pets. Parents rejoice that the children are "busily engaged in a good cause" and the dogs no longer are viewed as an "endless stream" of unwanted puppies to be disposed of at the end of a rifle or given to irresponsible playmates. The caring and follow-up by the Task Force was effective for I know of several children that have since taken their pets to the training sessions supported by the Task Force.

Realize and recognize that it is the children who are perhaps the greatest beneficiaries here. The Task Force is effecting a cultural change in that the animals are to be loved, tended, and respected - not simply used when convenient"

Jean F. Atthowe is President of the Montana Spay Neuter Task Force. The Task Force was founded in 1994 and its Mobile Service was founded in November 1997.