The Humane Society of the United States’ Pets for Life (PFL) program helps to build humane communities using innovative strategies and fresh approaches designed to extend the reach of animal services, resources, and information to underserved areas. Addressing the critical need for accessible, affordable pet care, our program helps animals by empowering the people who care for them. Communities of focus are identified through an in-depth assessment of income and other demographics, and the presence of animal care and veterinary services. This careful process is done in order to reach pet owners who face the greatest cultural and practical barriers in accessing services, such as cost, transportation, or lack of knowledge. One of the ways this is achieved is through large-scale community outreach events at which free and low-cost wellness and health care services such as vaccinations, spay/neuter, and others are provided.

Through the planning, training and execution of these events and focusing on underserved neighborhoods, PFL has created an effective methodology of how to perform a community assessment: identifying where the greatest need for services exists, how to conduct community outreach through building trust and relationships, how to execute an outreach event reaching a large number of pet owners with unaltered pets, and how to utilize follow-up to ensure an ongoing connection. The data in this report is evidence that there are large segments of our population that are not counted in animal welfare or veterinary statistics, and which are not being serviced by the animal welfare and veterinary fields. To successfully address this current gap in services, animal welfare service providers must recognize and understand the value in building trusting relationships with the human caregivers of companion animals. Meeting people where they are, approaching them without judgment, and understanding their circumstances is critical to the efforts of animal welfare service providers in creating real and lasting change in their communities. In other words, helping pets means helping people.
Since March 2010, The HSUS team has traveled to 11 markets in different regions of the U.S. and held 16 community outreach events with local partners, serving over 4,000 people and their 5,377 pets. The findings in this report are backed by data collected directly from pet owners who attended those events. Every pet that received services has a record and was considered in our data sets. A total of 5,377 short surveys in which pet owners responded to between 8 and 16 questions provides us with statistically valid information; that data has enabled PFL to confidently project and predict similar findings for the greater population within our target communities. This quantifiable feedback has provided the necessary validation for many presumptions that we can now address, while tracking and confirming effectiveness of the PFL approach. Furthermore, the data gathering process is cumulative and will continue to be built upon, helping paint a more detailed picture of where the most attention is needed. Finally, the data represents only part of the story; the full story of people and their pets can only be realized through continued relationship-building with the families.
Community outreach events were advertised and/or promoted using various methods depending on the market. When the event was promoted more heavily, through broadly targeted, traditional media such as television PSA’s or interviews, a proportionate number of attendees reported hearing of the event this way. For example, overall 14% (base: 8 events, 841 pet owners) cited TV/Radio as how they learned of the event, whereas in Toledo, a market that relied heavily on broadcast media promotion, 32% (n=313) cited broadcast media. An unsurprising correlation surfaces when comparing the overall average percentage of unaltered pets attending events to just one market such as Toledo. Overall, 66%, (n=3,590/14 events) of the pets at outreach events have been altered. In Toledo, where many efforts were made toward securing local broadcast media as a primary promotional method, only 45% (n=513 for Toledo) of the pets were unaltered.
Although the total attendance for an event may increase with traditional advertising, driving more target pet owners is not guaranteed. When non-traditional tactics are used, however, the results are more in line with PFL program goals: over 60% of the pets attending such events were unaltered.

When grassroots tactics were the primary promotional approach (i.e. when high percentages of attendees heard about the event through flyers or word of mouth) the proportion of attendees with unaltered pets – the target audience for spay/neuter messaging – significantly increased.

This data suggests that to most efficiently and effectively reach our target pet owner, we need to be out in the community: engaging people, having conversations and building a familiarity with our message and services, instead of relying solely on traditional marketing strategies.
Community outreach events present the perfect opportunity to start building relationships in the community and can be the positive introduction needed when working in a PFL neighborhood. Building trust takes time and is essential to achieving success in our work, particularly on the issue of spay/neuter. When we hold a community outreach event, one of the main goals is to discuss spay/neuter with the attendees and offer reduced or no-cost vouchers for people to have their pets altered whenever possible. Importantly, the grassroots marketing leading up to a microchip or vaccination clinic not only serves the purpose of informing a community about and driving pet owners to the event – it also creates an opportunity to meet people where they are while canvassing their neighborhood with event flyers.

On event day, those who have been engaged previously through advertising and/or canvassing are already familiar and have experienced a connection. In these cases, we have found conversations about wellness and spay/neuter to be much easier and better received. We have experienced firsthand that in our second or third conversation with people, they are incredibly open and willing to talk with us about ways they may need help with their pets. An example of the importance of touching people multiple times and the better connection this creates is demonstrated in the number of spay/neuter appointments set by pet owners at two Baton Rouge events held six months apart.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Baton Rouge [1st event]</th>
<th>Baton Rouge [2nd event]</th>
<th>Increase from 1st to 2nd Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td># of Pets at Event</td>
<td>215</td>
<td>259</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Unaltered Pets</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># of S/N Appts Set</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>233%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Unaltered Pets with S/N Appts</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>77%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
At the first event, minimal grassroots advertising was implemented, whereas with the second event, extensive canvassing efforts took place in the target community by HSUS, illume (a strategic communications firm) and local organizations being trained on effective promotional outreach techniques. At the first event, 49 spay/neuter appointments were set up, whereas at the second event in the spring, 163 were set. More impressive was the percentage of unaltered pets attending the second event that were signed up that day for spay/neuter: 77% [213 total], up from 30% [165 total] of unaltered pets from the first event.

Importantly, the success is not marked solely by the appointments set (or number of vouchers being disseminated) at the events – some of the most critical work is done through an organized and persistent follow-up effort. The people and pets living in underserved communities of focus have in many ways been invisible to animal service providers and have become used to broken promises. Therefore, a consistent presence in the community is necessary for residents to have confidence in services being offered.

It is crucial that we follow up almost immediately with a phone call (or visit if contact is not made via phone) to each person who was issued a spay/neuter voucher, let them know we appreciate their coming to the event, and ask if they have any questions about their appointment or the services provided. This will increase the likelihood they will have a positive experience with spay/neuter and – ideally – they will become ambassadors to others in their community. Additional follow-up is needed a day or two before the appointment date to confirm nothing unexpected has occurred since the first follow-up, and to once more encourage and share a positive message with the voucher holder. When we follow this process, the percentage of people who redeem their vouchers and follow through with their spay/neuter appointment increases significantly.
Completed Spay/Neuter Appointments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Appointments Set up</th>
<th>Follow-up Results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Toledo</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philadelphia</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atlanta</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>80%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chicago</td>
<td>71, 3 events</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As demonstrated through Toledo, Philadelphia and Atlanta events, we were able to set up 112, 77 and 71 spay or neuter appointments respectively, and after a thorough follow-up process, 83%, 82% and 80% of people had their pets spayed or neutered. In Chicago, we did not follow up appropriately with the pet owners who received vouchers at the outreach events, and the results suffered, with only 30% [n=71, based on 3 events] of people showing up for their pet’s surgery.*

When doing follow-up, patience and friendly persistence is imperative. People conducting the follow-up must remain non-judgmental and continue to foster positive relationships while sharing information. Some people take longer than others to decide to have their pet spayed/neutered, as they gather and process the reasons for having the surgery done. Notably, some may have misconceptions about the procedure, the results, or they simply have never given it much thought until being engaged on the topic by our PFL team or service providers. Regardless, people must come to this decision on their own – pet owners will unlikely comply if they feel forced into it or are given ultimatums. If people say no at first, we keep the lines of communication open and positive. It is also important to follow up with those who attended the event with unaltered pets, but who did not receive vouchers and/or set up a spay/neuter appointment. Word of mouth travels...
very swiftly and if people are treated with disrespect, they will share that with others. In the same vein, if people feel heard and understood, they will spread that message throughout their neighborhood as well.

*Note: We have not given up on the people in Chicago who did not make their spay/neuter appointments. Although we did not do proper follow up immediately, we are working on getting back in touch with each person to see if we can get them back on track and to have their pet(s) spayed or neutered. We are already seeing success in reaching some of these people and rescheduling their spay/neuter appointments, thus demonstrating the positive results attained when adhering to the follow up process.
WHY BREED SPECIFIC FOCUS CAN BE COUNTERPRODUCTIVE

In most of our communities of focus, there is a predominance of pit bull type dogs, and there can be a temptation to offer events that are specific to these dogs only. When we use a comprehensive approach and the events are open to the entire community, we actually end up providing services to a higher number of pit bull type dogs than when we target pit bulls exclusively. Holding the ‘breed specific’ events not only misses a huge number of other pets and people in the neighborhoods who would benefit from the services, but we also end up serving fewer pit bulls. Since pit bull type dogs are oftentimes the most popular pet in the neighborhoods where we work, a well-planned and marketed event will inevitably bring out a high percentage of this type of dog. Many pit bull owners have expressed a level of distrust and feel negatively targeted when exclusive events are held, while the open events are much more welcoming.

Since there is a wide range of pets in the community, it is important to avoid excluding anyone. Additionally, when we see poodles, cats, labs, pit bull type dogs, etc. all together at the same event, a great sense of community is created and we can begin to break down inaccurate perceptions of pit bull dogs. If we single these dogs out, then we should not be surprised when others do as well with negative intentions. Outreach events are a way to touch hundreds of people and pets in one day, and when we remove limitations, we can achieve greater success.

A clear difference in these approaches was demonstrated in a series of events we held in Chicago – two that were focused exclusively on pit bull type dogs and two that were open to the entire community. Aside from the breed-specific events (with invitations to the pit bull type dogs only) the events were all promoted similarly using a grassroots approach.
The majority of pet owners (between 63% and 96%) cite “word of mouth” and/or “flyers” as the way they learned about the event. The two pit bull targeted events drew far fewer pet owners, resulting in a total of 69 and 44 pets, with a strong majority (98% and 75% respectively) being pit bull type dogs served (101 pit bull type dogs total). The two events inviting all pet owners from the communities of focus resulted in many more attendees, with 117 and 157 pets. Not only were more unaltered pets served overall, but more pit bull type dogs were served – with a total of 128 being drawn to these events – because they were open and advertised to the entire community.
In the field of companion animal welfare, there have primarily been two points of measurement used to determine if a community is doing a good or bad job at reducing suffering and saving pets' lives: the intake and disposition numbers at local shelters. While these numbers are important, they tell a limited story. A significant segment of the population does not use (and are likely unfamiliar with) shelter, humane society, or animal control services, and therefore are not represented using these traditional forms of measurement. Shelter statistics are important, but if we want to address community animal welfare in a holistic way, we must look beyond them and take other factors into consideration.

Furthermore, there is a common misconception that areas indexing high in calls and shelter intake are also the logical areas to target with outreach work and low- or no-cost services. Although it is important to target high intake areas, it is also critical not to ignore underserved neighborhoods with low intake, based on the assumption that there must not be a problem if intake is low. We have discovered that many of the lowest income areas are not producing the largest numbers of intake for shelters, often because of the lack of trust or understanding residents of the communities have with the animal service providers and/or the accessibility to the services. These neighborhoods, however, are likely producing uncounted numbers and a significant portion of pets that end up in neighboring zip codes.
At our community outreach events, a large percentage of attendees (82% of pet owners with altered pets and 84% of pet owners with unaltered) answer ‘no’ to the question “Have you ever contacted Animal Control or the Animal Shelter?”, even when provided with multiple choice options of services commonly utilized. As a result, we can conclude that the shelter and animal control numbers are not on their own adequately addressing the full scope of companion animal suffering. We need to look deeper and continue to create new measurements that recognize the importance of working in underserved communities.
At the community outreach events, we have learned that a majority of attendees have never taken their pet/s to a veterinarian prior to the event being held. These results are not surprising, since we focus our events in significantly underserved areas that almost always lack access to a full service veterinarian in the immediate geographical location, and attendees are often culturally unaware of the importance or benefits of regular veterinary visits.

Furthermore, not having affordable veterinary services close to home makes such visits very difficult; these communities are largely made up of people living at or below the poverty level. Finding and utilizing animal welfare services is not a norm, and reliable personal transportation is often unavailable (especially since pets are usually not allowed on public transportation). The average income level in these communities also makes traditional veterinary care financially out of reach for most people and their pets. This is evidenced by the fact that most pets in attendance at the events are not altered, and people are willing to stand in line for hours to receive a single vaccination. In fact, at most events we see a much higher number of people whose pet(s) have never been to a vet than is indicated in the following chart. The overall numbers shown here are more even, due to the one large event in Toledo that attracted an abnormally high number of altered pets. When we attract more of our target audience to events, the percent having never seen a vet is much

Has your pet been to a veterinarian?
[base: unaltered pets, n=821, 8 events]
higher, such as the 61% of the attendees at an Atlanta event. We have also found that of those who have seen a vet before the outreach event, a large majority of those vet visits were due to an emergency and rarely for preventative care or general wellness.

A common misconception in the veterinary field is that if services are provided at low or no cost, this will cannibalize on the number of paying clients they would be serving. We have encountered this ideology in almost every market we have worked in, and although we have always maintained that the people and pets we are serving are not seeking general wellness care or spay/neuter at full service veterinarian offices, we can now clearly show that there is a large segment of the pet owning population that has never seen a veterinarian and until properly engaged on the issue, will not do so. The people we meet (and who are being ‘seen’ for the first time by those in the animal welfare field) love their pets and want to make the healthiest decisions possible. Once they trust the service providers and are given proper information in a way that is respectful, many of them will choose to integrate wellness care when and where they can afford it. The data collected shows that these free clinics and free vet services are not taking away paying clients, but rather creating new ones, providing the opportunity to have an extremely positive impact on companion animal health in a given community.

The strong correlation between unaltered animals and never having been to a veterinarian is an important one for both the animal welfare and veterinary communities to recognize. We now have evidence that strongly suggests that the more accessible and affordable veterinary services are, the more likely we are to see an increase in sterilization rates, helping to control companion animal populations, especially of those animals more at-risk of suffering or becoming homeless, such as pit bulls and cats. It is our mission to use findings such as this to inform dialogue, policy, and outcomes for companion animal welfare.
Where pets are obtained differs between those with altered and those with unaltered pets. We have found that pet owners with unaltered pets are much more likely (52%) to have acquired their pet from a friend, family or neighbor, than pet owners of altered pets (31%). Owners of unaltered pets are also significantly more likely to have acquired their pets through a “breeder”. Note, we understand from our “on the street” dialogs with people within the target communities that in this context, “breeder” is a combination of some larger scale breeding operations and individual pet owners mating one or two dogs for the sale of puppies, and they refer to themselves as breeders.

Where did you get your pet?
[base: 6 events]
This data suggests that people within underserved communities are likely having multiple unwanted litters that they rely on friends, family and neighbors to take. This also further supports our suggestion that the shelter is not on the radar of these pet owners since they are not bringing in their pets, and the shelter numbers do not represent the full story on pet population, as these litters are not ending up at the shelter.

Through the data collected at events, we have also learned that owners of altered pets are more likely to have rescued a stray (15% vs 7% of unaltered pets) or shelter animal (25% vs 3% of unaltered pets). This suggests a connection between the likelihood of a person to choose to have their pet spayed or neutered and an awareness of companion animal overpopulation. This is the second time HSUS research has underscored the importance of including information about shelter overpopulation and euthanasia in spay/neuter messaging, and in drawing a personal connection between the state of pet homelessness and an individual’s decision to sterilize their own pet(s).
The findings here contain valuable information for anyone working to improve companion animal health and welfare. For animal welfare organizations and advocates, we hope that this will influence a shift towards an understanding of how animal welfare issues fit within a complex set of human circumstances. We will not be successful in our efforts to save animal lives if we do not embrace the reality that many people and their companion animals live in poverty or various cultural realities, and that we will only improve conditions for animals when we build trusting and genuine relationships with their human caregivers and make animal care resources and information more accessible to them.

We need to be proactive and work to prevent animal suffering and homelessness by taking a critical look at where the greatest needs in our communities exist, and doing what we can to make sure we are inclusive in our efforts. We must strive for diversity in every aspect of our work and adjust our approach to meet the needs of an ever-changing society. As a field we cannot ignore the story told with this data if we truly want to create more humane communities.

For veterinary professionals, animal service providers and policy makers, it is our wish that these findings be used to inform a critical assessment of how services are provided and what barriers may exist that prevent many people with pets from accessing basic animal health care. The lack of access has a profound impact on the well-being of a community, from public health and safety to taxpayer dollars that fund animal control and other initiatives set up to respond to community animal problems.

We hope the animal welfare field, the veterinary community, and other stakeholders will continue to find ways to work together to address these concerns and find new solutions that benefit all interests. To create long term change, lessen suffering and reduce shelter intake, we must embrace a new perspective.