

Chapter 6: Community engagement

A key part of undertaking a successful Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR) programme is to **engage with and establish a friendly dialogue** with the residents in the community.

The purpose of this is three-fold:

- Promote the benefits of TNR for the Cats and the Community
- Identify any stray cats which could be targeted for the TNR programme
- Encourage community members to strive to co-exist with the community cats, including to continue to care for and feed them

Many people are not aware that stray cats live and thrive outdoors and that spaying or neutering improves their lives—and they may have concerns about the community cats that can be easily addressed.

Outreach tips

- Be professional, smile naturally and be relaxed
- Be warm, respectful, and non-judgemental
- Start the conversation by saying “hi”, introducing yourself and the purpose of your work.
- Be careful selecting your words to avoid belittling or offending someone. The better way to phrase your goal is to say that you’re **“sharing” helpful information**.
- Explain that TNR is the most humane and effective way of managing unowned/stray cat overpopulation issues. TNR offers a solution that helps both the cats and the human residents, providing first and foremost permanent population control since the cats will no longer be able to reproduce. Let them know that it also drastically changes the cats' behaviour—no more spraying, yowling or fighting.
- Referring to cats with a **gender-specific pronoun**, as in “*She* was spayed,” “He has been neutered” gives them value.
- Present information in a reasonable, professional manner and address individual complaints by listening patiently. Always maintain a constructive, problem-solving attitude.
- Explain that if the present cats are removed, the problems will recur with new cats (i.e. vacuum effect)
- **Humane!** This is a great word to sprinkle into your TNR conversations as often as possible. TNR uses humane traps; the practice as a whole is humane, allowing cats to live out their natural lives. No one wants to be considered inhumane, and TNR allows everyone to be a humane hero.

