

## **PAWS for Action – What we do to animals...**

**To run 1/10/2016**

Recently, at PAWS Humane we found ourselves in the unenviable position of trying to find placements for a couple of declawed adult cats with very disagreeable dispositions.

Cats get a bad rap in the world of animal rescue. To start with there are simply too many of them. They reproduce at an alarming rate and we can't get them spayed and neutered fast enough. Their chances for a positive outcome once they end up in shelters tends to be poor.

In Columbus, Georgia however, we have a great track record with cats thanks to a generous three year grant from Best Friends Animal Society which enables us to spay or neuter large numbers of un-owned community cats. In fact, it is primarily because of the Best Friends Community Cat Program that no cat has been euthanized for space in Columbus since the beginning of 2015.

That doesn't mean that we don't have to work hard for our success, especially when we find ourselves with special needs cats. This is just what we had in spades a couple of weeks ago with our sour pusses. Who wants a cantankerous cat in their home? The answer is, pretty much nobody. Yet, we also don't want to put a declawed cat in an established outdoor colony. They can't defend themselves from predators or other cats.

Each week a small group, representing various PAWS Humane departments, meets to discuss what interventions will help us get the best possible outcomes for hard to place animals. One member of this group believes that declawing a cat too often results in making the animal an even less desirable pet. In fact, one study showed that 33% of declawed cats suffered at least one behavioral problem after the surgery including increased biting behavior and litterbox issues.

The American Veterinary Medical Association describes onychectomy as an amputation and recommends that the decision to declaw a cat should be considered only after all attempts have been made to prevent the cat from using its claws destructively. Many veterinarians refuse to perform this surgery. Others see it as a preferable alternative to relinquishment of the cat to an uncertain fate.

According to the AVMA, "scratching is a normal feline behavior, is a means for cats to mark their territory both visually and with scent, and is used for claw conditioning and stretching." There are a number of interventions for problem scratching such as scratching posts, soft paws and/or regular nail trimming.

While the laws of the land may not support this idea, it is my opinion that animals are not things that we possess. They are living sentient beings with the capability to love others and to experience emotional pain when they are not understood and treated accordingly. Like us, they have basic biological and emotional needs and desires. We owe it to them to learn about their species and to get to know them as individuals. This is not a sacrifice on our part. It actually enriches our own existence to have these relationships. It is why so many of us have pets.

Nobody's perfect. If we required our family members to be perfect we would probably have to live alone. Those of us who want to be happy learn to give and take in relationships and/or negotiate some kind of truce when we find a behavior to be unbearable.

We did manage to determine what we consider to be optimal outcomes for our declawed kitties. Cleo went to a long-term foster home to be with a caretaker who has a deep understanding of cats. As we got to know Tilly we found that she does best as an only cat. She now has her own room at PAWS Humane and we will adopt her into a one-cat home.

*Bobbi Yeo lives in Opelika, AL. She is the CEO of PAWS Humane in Columbus, GA, an animal shelter and veterinary clinic offering low-cost spay/neuter and other services to the public. Email her at [bbyeo@pawshumane.org](mailto:bbyeo@pawshumane.org) with your comments and story ideas.*