



Shelter Outreach Services: Mobile Spay/Neuter Clinic



Compiled by ASPCA® and PetSmart Charities® and distributed to the field, September 2007. Visit the ASPCA® National Outreach website for animal welfare professionals: www.ASPCApro.org.

Shelter Outreach Services

Mobile high-volume spay/neuter clinic



SOS is a regional program serving a twelve county area in the Finger Lakes district in New York State. Their program brings veterinarians, vet techs and essential surgical equipment from a home base to locations in five surrounding, mostly rural counties.

Stats

- SOS has altered over 20,000 animals since June 2003.
- Shelters with no in-house clinics now are able to alter their animals in house.
- SOS has tripled the number of cats altered for one agency in a one year period.

How Cool is That?

We are particularly impressed by the progress this young organization has made. They have diligently communicated their program to the local veterinarians and gained their acceptance. Simultaneously, they have worked closely with the local shelters to involve them and their volunteers in the success of the program.

Adopt or Adapt

This program could be adapted to either upsize or downsize. This profile also provides a wonderful blueprint on ways to approach a community with a new program that elicits buy-in. If you are planning on creating a traveling spay/neuter clinic of any size, check the licensing regulations in your state.

SOS hopes to mentor other groups who want to set up similar programs. They welcome groups to call them for help.

Shelter Outreach Services: The Whole Story

SOS brings all staff and equipment from a home base directly to the shelters they serve. The traveling program visits one community per day, four days a week.

In each community, a participating animal agency schedules animals for surgeries on the day of the visit, provides an appropriate room for the surgeries to take place, and provides staff or volunteers to assist. From 25 to 30 animals are altered during each one-day visit at low-cost or subsidized prices.



Key to the success of SOS is their dedication to working in collaboration with local shelters and humane organizations to provide low-cost, high volume, high quality spay/neuter services for the animals AND the community.

[Who They Are and What They Do](#)
[Ingredients and Prep Work](#)
[Step by Step](#)
[Results](#)
[Some Words of Wisdom](#)

Who They Are and What They Do

Dr. Leslie Appel, Executive Director; Dr. Appel is also on staff in National Outreach, ASPCA.

As a faculty member at the Cornell Veterinary School, Dr. Appel ran a program that provided surgeries for shelters from the surrounding area as a service to the community, and as hands-on experience for veterinary students. When budget cuts eliminated that program, Dr. Appel felt so strongly about the need for these services to continue that she started her own non-profit to provide them. The ultimate goal of SOS is to decrease pet overpopulation and euthanasia in the region, and improve the quality of life for companion animals.

The key to the program is to bring the services of a high-quality high-volume low cost s/n operation to several communities on a rotating basis, working in conjunction with local shelters and humane groups for the benefit of the animals and the community.

SOS provides necessary surgical and medical services for:

- Shelter animals and other stray/unclaimed animals
- Feral cats/barn cats/cat colonies
- Animals from rescue organization
- Animals from families of low income
- Animals on Native American Indian Nations

In addition to spay/neuter, SOS veterinarians will treat such conditions as ear mites, remove abscessed teeth, amputate injured tails, or other minor needs, on a limited basis and when possible while the animal is under anesthesia. Any treatment given, and any further treatment recommended, is written on the release form and communicated verbally to the owners when they pick up their pet.

Ingredients and Prep Work

Prerequisites

- Identify what low cost spay/neuter services are needed in approximately a 70-mile radius, or a one-hour drive from a central point, given the area's geography.
- Identify two or more animal shelters or welfare groups within a one hour driving range that want to participate in a mobile spay/neuter program.
- Identify or establish a lead organization incorporated as a 501 c 3 non-profit. If the organization is a start-up just for this program there must be sufficient general business and professional liability insurance to cover the organization's activities.
- Acquire a space at location of the lead organization to use as a Home Base to store the equipment between trips. This can be a garage at someone's house.

People

SOS pays an Executive Director a salary of \$35,000 a year.

Each day of surgery requires:

- one veterinarian at \$325 per day
- one vet tech at \$18/hour

This can be done with full time employment of each, or with more than one of each paid daily on a contract basis to make up the full time equivalents. For instance, two veterinarians who work two days a week each, plus one who works one day a week could fill a week's requirement.

- SOS provides benefits: health insurance, 401K and licensing fees

In addition:

- One veterinary assistant at \$10/hour working about 10 hours per week

This individual works after-hours at Home Base cleaning and autoclaving equipment and cutting drapes for the next day

- SOS provides Continuing Education for its staff.

At each location on the day of surgery:

- Two to five volunteers or staff members from the shelter

At each location, during the week between surgery visits:

- One or more volunteers or staff members to set up appointments for the surgery day, return phone calls and answer general questions about the program

Up-front Costs and Startup Funding

Basic equipment to transport to each surgical location, estimated cost: \$30,000 to \$40,000.

Major equipment:

- Anesthesia machines (2), autoclave, pulse oximeter
- Surgical instruments
- Daily supplies
- Medical supplies
- Non-Medical supplies

Note: Finding companies willing to discount or donate equipment, or purchasing good used equipment, can lower that amount significantly.

Vehicle to transport personnel and equipment from home base to participating shelters.

- A van would be the best choice, but SOS operated successfully for several months with a mid-size car owned by one of the veterinarians.
- Estimated cost for a no-frills cargo van - \$ 25,000, less if used.

SOS was able to buy their van used from the Cornell Fleet Garage for \$3,700; it was in great shape, and had only 50,000 miles at purchase! They were fortunate to secure a major donation of \$4,000 which gave them an additional \$300 towards gas.

Time Line

Once funding is obtained for purchase of equipment:

- Purchase and get delivery of equipment: 2 months (may be done simultaneously with step two)
- Visit and enlist participating agencies: 2 months
- Participating agencies adapt their space to accommodate surgery day, perhaps building shelves or tables or putting in sinks or exhaust vents: 2 months
- Advertise availability of low-cost s/n service through flyers and news releases in the participating communities: 1 month prior to opening

Total time required: 4 - 6 months.

Step by Step

1. Set up a fee schedule.

SOS fee schedule is:

- Dog Spay: \$75
- Dog Neuter: \$55
- Cat Spay: \$45
- Cat Neuter: \$25

Vaccines (DHLPP, FVRCP - RV): \$3

Ivermectin for ear mites: \$3

Additional charges for:

- In heat, pregnant, pyometra, umbilical hernia: \$10
- Cryptorchid: \$10 - 20

2. Set up an annual operating budget.

3. Hold individual meetings with each organization that may want to participate.

Each animal agency must commit to:

- Provide an appropriate room for the veterinarians to set up in
- Equip the room with essentials such as a table that can be used for surgery, space and cages and carriers to hold the animals pre- and post- surgery, an opening to the outside for venting anesthetic gases, plumbing and electricity to support equipment and sanitation needs, air-conditioning and heat
- Provide 2 - 5 volunteers to work a long day on the day of the surgeries.

- Provide at least one volunteer to set up appointments during the week and answer phone calls and questions about the program
- Collect payment from the responsible party. Some shelters seek grants and donations to subsidize the cost for low-income or stray animals; however SOS receives the same fee in every case in order to balance their income with expenses.

4. Visit each agency and identify a room that can be used as the Operating Room.

Any facility can be made to work. If necessary, the room can be in another nearby location such as the fire department or other building where donated space is available.

Be sure to consider:

- Traffic pattern
- Size/space
- Availability of plumbing for a scrub sink

A window for ventilation of anesthetic gas (ISO) (ventilation can also be achieved by cutting a hole through the wall for the tubing to run through (landlord approval is probably necessary for this)).

5. Develop a system for transporting equipment.

- Use large plastic bins to transport and store equipment and supplies.
- Use a locked box to transport drugs.
- You may want to build wooden cases for certain delicate equipment.
- Work out the best order to load the vehicle - repeating the same routine and order daily makes the loading and unloading go quickly once the team is experienced.

6. Visit or call private practitioners in the served communities.

Explain the program to all. Let them know the focus is unowned or low-income family animals.

7. Develop a working relationship with at least one veterinarian in each community.

- To fill prescriptions during the surgery days for animals with specific needs
- To provide emergency services overnight in case an animal develops serious complications (SOS pays the fee for those services)

8. Set up a travel plan.

Plan a four-day week, and one location for each day. Schedule can be done in various ways, for example:

- 4 shelters, each visited 1 day a week
- 2 shelters, each visited 2 days a week
- 8 shelters, each visited 1 day every two weeks

9. Advertise availability of low-cost spay/neuter in the communities on the circuit.

Print flyers to post in grocery stores, libraries, drugstores, or wherever people gather and you can get permission to post. A short announcement can be sent to the local newspaper or shoppers weekly with a request that they print it as a public service.

Note: If the participating agency can fill the quota with shelter animals or rescues they are already handling, it may not be necessary to advertise. Advertising can be started later if/when there are openings not being immediately booked.

Results

The Numbers

SOS has altered over 20,000 animals since its inception in June 2003.

One of the participating agencies reported that in the 3 years prior to SOS, they had managed to get 1,000 animals, mainly cats, altered through vouchers with local vets or transporting the animals to Cornell for the student program there. With SOS, they have altered 1,000 animals in just 14 months.

Indications of progress:

- While reliable statistics for euthanasia rates are not available, some animal control agencies believe they are seeing fewer cats.
- One participating group reports that for the first several months most of the animals they saw were owned animals in pretty good shape. Now they are seeing more strays and ferals who are not very healthy. That could indicate that they have made progress serving the low-income families with pets, and are moving into a more hard-core source of pet overpopulation

Critical Factors

- High quality standards for surgery and animal care are "an absolute must."
- Dedicated and reliable volunteers.
- Creativity to choose a space in each location and visualize how it can be made to work as an Operating Room.
- Hard work to build or find and install tables and shelves to make the space work.

Thinking Outside the Box

Continuing education opportunities for veterinarians and vet techs are paid for by SOS, which makes these positions more comparable to what a veterinary practice might offer and helps assure the continuing quality of services.

Above and Beyond

Some activities of participating agencies that amplify the program's effectiveness:

- Providing ad-hoc pick up and drop off service if someone is without transportation or has other issues that keep them from bringing the animal in,
- Meeting people halfway (sometimes people from other shelters further out) to pick up and drop off animals
- Creating a database in Access that computerizes and facilitates appointment scheduling and documentation.
- Subsidizing or providing the surgery for free by paying for it from their own funds (which they get from fundraising or grants) for people who have trouble paying the regular fee
- Providing humane traps free for trapping of feral cats
- Loaning pet carriers on an honor system, asking they be dropped off back at the shelter (phone number of the agency is painted on the carrier)

- Doing all the form-filling themselves to make the process less intimidating for the public
- Treating for fleas when necessary for a very low or no charge

How They Feel About What They Did

- Veterinarians and vet techs are very pleased to be able to help reduce euthanasia rates and make a positive difference for the animals they handle, and still be able to make a reasonable living practicing their profession.
- Volunteers are enthusiastic about doing something measurable and substantial to help animals. Each animal altered is seen as a success.
- All participants are delighted by the communication and camaraderie that has developed among the participating agencies and also with the SOS professionals.
- Morale among the participants is high.

What They Would Do Differently

Set up a computer database and enter data from day one. Data is useful for documenting activities and success for fundraising purposes.

Their Next Steps

SOS is working on writing funding proposals to foundations to be able to expand their services.

Some Words of Wisdom

What Worked

The results of their thorough communications:

- The commitment and quality of volunteers at local shelters is incredible. Before SOS many of the local groups felt they were fighting a losing battle against pet overpopulation with few resources to aid them. Now they feel they are doing something substantial to help animals.
"Job satisfaction" is high and volunteers tend to stick with the job. Some groups have more volunteers than they need. All volunteers have learned a great deal about animal health by working with the SOS veterinarians.
- The agencies, that previously had little or no communication, now talk regularly, including annual Sharing days where all the groups get together in a central location to learn from one another.
- Volunteers and clients have created a grassroots "word of mouth" promoting spay/neuter and SOS and the local agency.

Be Prepared For

- Skepticism on the part of private practitioners in the communities served. Communication is key to diffusing opposition.
- Scheduling being the hardest part of the job, due to a percentage of no-shows and sometimes dealing with people whose own lives may not be functioning well

Tell Us What You Think

With the information we've provided, can you start a program like this one in your organization? [Click here](#) to send an e-mail to ASPCA® National Outreach with your feedback.

SOS: Thumbnail Sketch

78 Dodge Road
Ithaca, NY 14850

<http://www.shelteroutreachservices.org/>



SOS's mission is to improve the quality of life and decrease suffering for companion animals by stemming the staggering animal over-population problem and by providing veterinary health care to companion animals in need.

Staff

- 1 Executive Director
- 3 part-time veterinarians
- 1 full-time veterinary technician
- 1 part-time veterinary assistant

Operating Budget

- \$240,000 annual operating budget
- \$225,000 of their income comes from fees for services

Business Type

- 501(c) (3) nonprofit