



SpayJax: Government-Funded Support for Spay/Neuter



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.

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Government-funded support for spay/neuter



SpayJax is a government-funded spay/neuter voucher program serving low-income pet owners in Duval County, Florida. SpayJax is administered by First Coast No More Homeless Pets of Jacksonville, FL.

Stats

- SpayJax has been responsible for 11,000 spay/neuter surgeries in the first two and a half years since its founding.
- In January 2003, just months after the launch of SpayJax, Jacksonville reached a turning point, changing from an annual upward trend in shelter admissions to a downward trend. In the past three years, there has been a direct correlation between the number of SpayJax surgeries and the shelter intake of owned and stray animals.
- In the first half of fiscal year 2004/2005, Duval County shelters experienced a 3.7% decrease in pet and stray intake from the year before.
- Admissions of puppies for the first half of the fiscal year 2004/2005 decreased by 25%. Kitten admissions decreased by 14%.
- The percentage of owned and stray pets being euthanized in Jacksonville decreased 5% between fiscal year 2003/2004 and fiscal year 2004/2005.

How Cool is That?

At the time that he decided to get involved with solving the problem of pet overpopulation in the Jacksonville area, Rick DuCharme, founder and director of SpayJax, was a "private citizen" who saw an opportunity to make a big difference in his community. He was able to convince the City of Jacksonville that government funding for a spay/neuter program targeted to low-income pet owners would not only make an importance difference in the lives of animals and people but would ultimately save the city money as well.

Adopt or Adapt

As Rick says, you don't have to wait for those "in charge" to make things happen. Nor do you have to be an animal-welfare professional to make a difference in the lives of animals in your community. The knowledge, commitment, and persistence of private citizens can be powerful forces for change.

SpayJax: The Whole Story

SpayJax is a government-funded spay/neuter voucher program serving low-income pet owners in Duval County, Florida.

The program is endorsed by the Jacksonville Veterinary Medical Society and administered by First Coast No More Homeless Pets, a non-profit organization dedicated to ending the killing of adoptable dogs in cats in their community through spay/neuter, adoption, and education.

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Who They Are and What They Do

Rick DuCharme, Director

This profile focuses on how SpayJax obtained and manages its municipal government support. For detailed information about the entire SpayJax program, and a wealth of materials you can download to implement a similar program, see the SpayJax profile at the [SpayUSA website](#).

In 2000, the Mayor of Jacksonville, Florida, formed a Task Force on Animal Control to study the feasibility of adding a new animal shelter to a larger municipal redevelopment plan for which he was trying to generate public support. Rick DuCharme, a Jacksonville property owner and volunteer at the local humane society, saw this as an opportunity to bring the importance of spay/neuter to the attention of government officials. Rick wrote a letter expressing his interest and outlining his considerable research into the pet overpopulation problem and was appointed to the Task Force.

Throughout the Task Force deliberations, which covered a wide range of topics related to animal care and control, Rick campaigned vigorously for a publicly funded spay/neuter program. Most of the recommendations of the Task Force were never implemented. But in 2002 the City of Jacksonville put out a request for proposals to set up and manage a countywide spay/neuter program targeted to low-income pet owners. Rick formed First Coast No More Homeless Pets and submitted a proposal. The proposal was accepted and the City of Jacksonville earmarked \$250,000 for the program.

Here's how SpayJax works:

- Pet owners call the Spay/Neuter Hotline and are pre-qualified for the SpayJax free spay/neuter program or referred to two privately funded low-cost spay/neuter programs operated by First Coast No More Homeless Pets.
- To qualify for SpayJax, pet owners must be on Medicaid, or one of several specified government assistance programs including Food Stamps, WIC, SSI, Section 8 Government Housing, and AFDC. They can also qualify by demonstrating that their family income does not exceed 250% of the U.S. Government poverty guidelines.
- Those who qualify for SpayJax are sent a certificate with qualification details and a list of participating veterinarians. They select a veterinarian and make an appointment.
- The veterinary clinic staff verifies the qualification, completes the certificate, and performs the surgery. A free rabies vaccination is included. Clients are required to purchase a \$16 license.
- Twice a month, the veterinary clinic sends certificates and qualification documentation to the SpayJax office. SpayJax staff check to make sure everything is in order and prepares an invoice listing all of the surgeries.
- The City reimburses SpayJax for the cost of the surgeries plus a \$7.50 administration fee per surgery.

- SpayJax, in turn, pays the veterinarians according to the following negotiated fee schedule:
 - Male Cats \$35
 - Female Cats \$65
 - Male Dogs \$65
 - Female Dogs \$100 (\$75 additional for dogs over 75 pounds)

The Hotline handles an average of 250 calls a week. SpayJax has been responsible for 11,000 surgeries since its inception in December of 2002.

Ingredients and Prep Work

Prerequisites

Awareness, experience, and education helped to develop Rick DuCharme's passion for ending pet homelessness and euthanasia:

- He first became convinced of the importance of spay/neuter when, as a kid, he heard Bob Barker end every Price is Right show with the words "Remember to Spay and Neuter Your Pets".
- As an adult, he became a donor and then a volunteer and board member at his local humane society all the while feeling that spay/neuter was the logical solution to the pet overpopulation problem.
- He began attending conferences and studying existing programs, searching for those that had a measurable impact on the number of animals entering shelters. He was particularly impressed by the New Hampshire model and the Maddie's Fund-sponsored work in Alabama. When the City of Jacksonville sent out a request for proposals for a county-wide spay/neuter program, Rick had the knowledge to put together a viable, results-driven program.

People

When the City of Jacksonville put out the request for proposals, Rick had no organization in place to respond. He quickly put together First Coast No More Homeless Pets, tapping two nationally recognized spay/neuter experts to be his other board members.

Rick currently serves as paid director. However, he plans to give up his modest salary in the coming year so the organization can hire a development director and additional support staff.

The staff currently consists of:

- 1 executive director (presently volunteer)
- 1 paid full time office manager/hotline supervisor (staffs spay/neuter hotline)
- 3 volunteer operators
- 1 volunteer bookkeeper (handles billing)
- 1 paid part time staff person (handles all paperwork)
- 1 volunteer staff person
- Volunteers to promote program in community

Up-front Costs and Startup Funding

SpayJax funding comes from the City of Jacksonville's General Fund through the Animal Care and Control Department budget. For the first three years, the City allocated \$250,000 to the SpayJax Program. That covered the total cost of the program. By 2005, the City contract covered only approximately 50% of the cost. For 2006, as a result of a tight City budget, the contract has been reduced to \$125,000.

Timeline

It took approximately 3 years from the formation of the Mayor's Task force to when the first SpayJax surgery was performed.

Step by Step

1. Be on the lookout for opportunities to bring the issue of spay/neuter to the attention of government officials.

Rick acknowledges that, had it not been for the Mayor's Task Force, (which was really motivated by a desire to gain support for a redevelopment project) there would be no SpayJax. Although Rick had nothing to do with the establishment of the Task force in Jacksonville, he was quick to volunteer his services. The Task Force became his vehicle for pushing a spay/neuter agenda with those in a position to make it happen.

2. Understand the motivation of public officials.

Rick understood that the Mayor and Council would only be interested in funding spay/neuter if he could demonstrate that it would reduce the number of animals coming into local shelters and the cost of local animal control.

3. Do your homework.

Rick spent over three years researching spay/neuter programs across the country. His knowledge of the New Hampshire model enabled him to show his fellow task force members that increasing spay/neuter would lead to a reduction in animals coming into local shelters. When the time came to present a program to the City, he was ready.

Results

The Numbers

SpayJax has been responsible for 11,000 spay/neuter surgeries in the first two and a half years since its founding.

In January 2003, just months after the launch of SpayJax, Jacksonville reached a turning point, changing from an annual upward trend in shelter admissions to a downward trend. In the past three years, there has been a direct correlation between the number of SpayJax surgeries and the shelter intake of owned and stray animals.

In the first half of fiscal year 2004/2005, Duval County shelters experienced a 3.7% decrease in pet and stray intake from the year before.

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Critical Factors

- Targeting low-income pet owners. Government officials don't want to spend tax dollars to alter animals for owners who can afford the full veterinary fees. According to Rick, 80% of the pet overpopulation problem is generated by 3% of the population, most of whom are low-income. He believes that if you're not targeting low income, most of the animals you're altering would have been done anyway.
- Studying the overpopulation problem from all angles, particularly those that would be of interest to government officials.

- Focusing on long-term solutions. Rather than seeking funds to build a shelter to house more animals, SpayJax focused on a program aimed at solving the city's pet overpopulation problem and saving the city money over time.

Thinking Outside the Box

For those wanting to make a difference in the lives of animals, Rick has these recommendations:

- Don't wait to be asked. Seek opportunities to get your message to decision-makers and jump right in.
- Don't wait for those "in charge" to make things happen. In Jacksonville, when SpayJax was started, the Humane Society was not an ally and neither was Animal Control. Both have since changed direction and now work closely with SpayJax, but getting everyone on board at the outset would probably not have worked.

How They Feel About What They Did

Rick expresses satisfaction in the fact that SpayJax kept its promise to government funders that the program could bring about a reduction in the number of animals entering shelters. Overall shelter intake is down and puppy/kitten intake is down dramatically.

Their Next Steps

Rick is eager to find a more consistent method of funding the SpayJax program. While the government contract funded through the city's General Fund has been a very good thing, it has not proved to be a dependable source of income. When other priorities arose that required General Fund support, the program lost out. Therefore, in addition to seeking a long-term government contract funded by a dedicated source of income, Rick is planning on reaching out for more non-government support.

Some Words of Wisdom

Rick suggests keeping these thoughts in mind when securing public funding:

- Government contracts inevitably come with strings. The Jacksonville Council decided in 2005 to require that everyone making use of the free spay/neuter program purchase a \$16 license tag. That kept many people away and reduced the effectiveness of the program.
- You have to negotiate constantly with government.
- The work is a constant battle and things are always changing. Once you remove one roadblock, often another, tougher one appears in its place.

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 email to ASPCA® National Outreach with your feedback and questions.

SpayJax: Thumbnail Sketch

SpayJax is administered by:

First Coast No More Homeless Pets
PO Box 50696
Jacksonville, FL 32240

FirstCoastNMHP@aol.com
<http://www.fcnmhp.org>

The mission of First Coast No More Homeless Pets is to end the killing of adoptable dogs in cats in their community through spay/neuter, adoption, and education.

Staff

- 1 executive director (currently volunteer)
- 1 paid full time office manager/hotline supervisor (staffs spay/neuter hotline)
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Operating Budget

For 2006, as a result of a tight City budget, the SpayJax contract has been reduced to \$125,000, which covers only about 50% of operations. SpayJax is actively working to identify more reliable, non-governmental sources of funding.

Business Type

501(c) (3) nonprofit