

## Oregon Outback Humane Society Project (2012-ongoing)

**The Situation:** Lake County, Oregon forms the northwest section of the Western Great Basin. Its 8,000 square miles of high desert are populated by around 8,000 people, most of whom reside in small clusters. Natural resources comprise the economic base of this remote county, with its inhabitants largely employed in forestry and ranching. Relative to San Leon county, there are more seniors and much fewer families speaking non-English in their homes. Lake county's poverty percentage, however, closely resembles that of San Leon.

**The Challenge:** Expansive, sparsely populated high desert southern Oregon county whose population lives long distance from veterinarian and low cost spay-neuter services. Winter cold, resource-limited households, unwanted litters, some backyard breeding, and feral cats are significant issues.

**The Rescuers:** Martina (OOHS founder and organizer, grant writer, foster home, TNR active worker, outreach co-organizer) and DJ (longtime resident animal helper and networker, spay-neuter organizer transporter, negotiator, and OOHS outreach co-organizer).

**The Project:** Late 2011 OOHS and 31Paws started talking about the importance of proactive rescue and, to enable this, to outfit a mobile spay/neuter unit for use in Lake County (Oregon Outback). January 2012 OOHS submitted a grant proposal which 31Paws funded; work started that month and is ongoing.

**The Conversations:** In a set of Q&As, 31Paws asked Martina and DJ to talk about their proactive animal rescue work – the strategies, successes, and failures with the Oregon Outback people and animals.



Martina



DJ

## Martina



**31Paws:** We met Martina in 2009 at various pet adoption events in Bend, Oregon; she always had a number of cats and dogs looking for homes; always had a smile on her face, and always was optimistic about her latest idea for her group, Oregon Outback Humane Society (OOHS), to do better by some animals in their more southern Oregon county. Late 2011, we by chance told her what the San Leon group was doing and she got very excited because her group, too, was heading in the “proactive rescue” direction and was thrilled to hear it had a name and a funding organization (us). We went back and forth, listening to her ideas, and early 2012 decided to fund an OOHS project. And so here we are....

**31Paws:** Hi Martina, thanks for being willing to answer a few of our questions. First off:

### **1. Could you please briefly identify and describe the different outreach programs your group runs in Lake County, Oregon?**

**Martina:** Sure, I’m the organizer and grant writer so bear with me as I answer somewhat categorically – this is really the only way I stay sane.

1. Spay Neuter - provide low cost spay neuter options for persons who want to have their pets altered. We currently have two focuses:

- Companion animals persons conscientiously brought into their homes.
- Stray cats people are willing to care for

With DJ's help and the partnership of Lakeview Animal Hospital OOHS started a low cost spay neuter program for companion animals in fall of 2007. It was initially directed specifically to persons having financial difficulties - a very specific income requirement. This was per the vets request to make sure clients that would come in on their own at full cost would not take advantage of the program. It also allowed us to have a “boundary” because with limited resources you have to have boundaries to temper yourself. We slowly added anyone who was having financial difficulties due to "other" circumstances, having DJ generally be the keeper of that gate as she knows so many people. We successfully served the southern portion of Lake county and to a point the mid portion.

Then DJ added trips to Companion Pet Clinic in Klamath Falls to give incentive to anyone willing to fix and care for stray or feral cats, we can help you fix them low cost of you continue to care for them. Again, this program successfully serves southern and mid sections of the county.

With the development of the TNR Program we now concentrate on tame stray cats for these trips.

Occasionally we look to Bend Spay Neuter Clinic (175 miles away) to help people in the northern communities. We block a specific number of spaces out for a day and do mass transport. We do not do these frequently anymore. The trip proved to be more than we could sustain from a volunteer perspective. It means leaving Lakeview at about 4:00 am and coordinating with people from a distance.

From an animal perspective, both transport programs work well for cats but is not practical for dogs. Several reasons – dogs are much harder to handle logistically, they take up more space (so costs per trip increase) and people tend to worry more about the dogs so there are some



difficulties with dealing with the people.

2. TNR – provide low cost and free spay and neuter surgeries to persons caring for feral community cats

We started this program from a community wide - "grassroots" perspective when DJ took the first feral cats to Companion Pet Clinic....probably in 2008. DJ would help a person catch a cat or the person themselves catch a cat or two. DJ would make an appointment with Companion Pet Clinic (92 miles west of Lakeview) and they would block out ½ a day once a month to do Lake County cats. Not targeted focus, but a good service. It does help some when we have a caretaker dedicated to the cats they know of. This is a case by case basis and once again DJ is the gatekeeper. At the beginning, it was generally a few people who really cared about cats and who had disposable income to pay \$30 to get a cat fixed. We still do this for anyone interested in fixing a cat they are caring for. Trips are combined with picking up food for our Pet Food Share Program.

In the fall of 2010 we started a “professional” – targeted TNR effort. This is way more labor intensive but also provides the biggest benefit. We partner with Dr Emily Sare for this and do mass trappings and high volume surgery weekends (upwards of 60 cats in two days). The idea is to target specific areas of our community where there are a high number of feral community cats, where we get lots of calls from people for help “finding them homes” or where people call us about abandoned wild kittens. IT NEEDS TO BE FOCUSED! You also need to make sure companion cats in those areas are targeted for SN as well. I will go into more detail in questions specific to TNR and the TNR Protocols.

One aspect of this program that reaches beyond the program itself is the door to door outreach we do prior to the trappings. It is essential for effectiveness and to keep a positive relationship with the caretakers and neighbors.



3. Pet Food Share -- Pet Food Share was started mainly because there was a grant opportunity from a national organization specifically targeted at keeping pets in homes during the home foreclosure crisis. We have pet food donated from a big chain store – 92 miles away in Klamath Falls – and do monthly giveaways.

As you can imagine, the need is greater than the resources. SO to narrow down who can participate all pets in the household must either already be spayed/neutered or the people need to sign up to do so through OOHS. In addition, participants fill out a survey that gives us information we can use to increase our effectiveness in the community.

Pet Food Share has facilitated many spay and neuter surgeries.



4. Community Pet Days -- Our most recent outreach events include vaccinations, microchips, free collars/leashes and other information. This is specifically designed to meet people and pets who need help and facilitate that help to the best of our ability. It is still a work in progress, but a much needed program.



## 2. And why did you choose these programs?

**Martina:** These programs are in addition to the Adoption/Foster Program which, thankfully, is decreasing. I think there will always be a need for this, but more lives are improved and saved with the outreach programs. I consider any program that allows a person to better care for and keep an animal an outreach program.

We started with the idea of "rescue" due to the lack of any shelter in our area. When a stray dog has three days to be reclaimed then 3 hours to be re homed before they are euthanized, you

end up having lots of dogs looking for homes and being killed. When there is no option for stray or unwanted cats, they are simply abandoned.

But, we quickly figured out not only could we (my husband Mark and I and a couple foster homes) not take in every animal out there needing a home, but there were simply not enough homes for them all. It is something we all hear but until you are knee deep in homeless animals it does not sink in. I have heard the expression good adopters are made, not born. Well that needs to go one step farther, it needs to apply to the people who are the potential homes giving up the animals....some good owners are made, not born.

These programs were also a response to a lack of other organizations in our large county. Not everyone wants to give up their pet, but they need help caring for them.

### 3. How many volunteers does OOHS have to run these programs?

**Martina:** It depends on the program..the Spay and Neuter Companion Animals program takes 1 -2 people to administer, additional daily volunteers when we do other events is helpful to assist with SN sign up.

TNR takes 1 – 3 total or more if they take different tasks. This is probably the hardest to recruit for. Outreach (1-3) Trapping (1-3) Clinic (1-2) Cleaning traps and laundry (1-2) Follow-up Outreach (1-4)

Pet Food Share takes 2-3, plus we look for one day volunteers to help transport food.

Community Pet Days takes 2-3 for pre planning, probably less after we do a couple. Day of Event 2 -7 plus people hanging flyers pre event. Depends on service and location. In Christmas Valley we had 10 volunteers to run smoothly. Could do with 7 now that we have experience. We did 76 dogs and 14 cats. Paisley – we did with 2 volunteers. But only did 8 dogs.

ALL PROGRAMS DATA ENTRY DOES REQUIRE LABOR! – OK this is NOT glamorous or necessarily the sexy part of any of this but you need people willing to enter data for ALL of these programs! People will think you are nuts for wanting this, but they are not the ones that grant makers are grilling for numbers or the ones trying to determine how much running these programs cost or what you can or cannot do without going broke. Being able to track your effectiveness is paramount to not only saving lives but to securing the funding needed to do so. It ain't cuddling kittens or saving that dog with the sad eyes but is equally if not more important. You can play Sara McLaughlin while you do it if it makes you feel good.

So find an introvert that loves animals and being on the computer and get them interested. And when you find them, have them call me!



#### 4. How much money does each cost a year?

**Martina:** To run OOHS and offer all we did in 2011 (Jan-Dec) – about \$40,912.64. This was donations and grants. In 2011 here is what we spent. REMEMBER the grant part of it means we HAD to spend that \$\$ on that program. Consequently we wrote grants for what we thought were priorities as well as what grant makers are currently emphasizing. Luckily, those match our current focuses.

If we did not have the grants we would be making more immediate decisions on a month to month basis regarding what programs we wanted to fund for how much each month. The actual funds would be different, but the percentages would probably be pretty close with a potential to take \$\$ out of the Adoption Foster Program to use for Spay and Neuter.

I hate to put a “how much does it cost” on each because if we had less we would still do this and if we had more we would still do this. It’s more about doing SOMETHING rather than thinking it is going to cost too much and I can’t make that kind of \$\$\$.

To start an organization like OOHS and make a difference on some level you will need to cover the cost of your liability insurance (you really need this with the OOHS model), money to file with the state and federal governments (there are grants for this), and whatever you can scrape up.

If you can raise \$500 and help 5 people fix their dogs, you are making a difference. As much as you want to spend that \$500 rescuing 2 dogs, make sure you spend at least some of it on SN or you will NEVER get ahead. Never. You can run all these programs with less. You really can. You just do what you can afford, pay your bills and go from there.

So I will present you with OUR numbers. But remember, we did it with less at first and when all the grant opportunities have been tapped and we are back to relying JUST on donations we will continue. Every month we look at the general fund and make hard decisions about what we can do on the rescue side. Spay Neuter, TNR and Community Pet Days all currently have grants tied to them. Pet Food Share – pretty minimal as costs to run are low low low. Basically just money to pick up food and transport it to the communities for distribution. We can usually find someone “going there” anyway so that cuts that cost.

ALL the programs – 89% of the expenses \$36522.96

Of the total program expenses:

**\$14,695 Spay Neuter Companion Animals and Tame Stray Cats – 40%**

This was paid for through grants, donations and co-pays.

**\$9,828 TNR both Targeted and piecemeal – 27%**

This was paid for by grants and donations and some co-pay. Over ½ was from a grant.

**\$1,190 Pet Food Share – 3%**

This was paid for by a grant.

The remaining \$10, 840 in program expenses, 30%, was for the adoption/foster program.

This came from fundraisers, donations, grant. \$4,360 – tires for vehicles, liability and vehicle insurance, misc costs like voicemail, website, paper, ink, some fundraising costs etc.

**5. Can you get many donations from inside the county -- how hard do you try and how do you try?**

**Martina:** A little under one half the donations we receive are from county residents and businesses. In 2007, the national average per resident of donations to animal welfare programs was about \$3.50. Based on our population that should get us (being the only animal welfare organization in the county) about \$27,800 in donations per year in our area. Given the economic climate nationally recently and the economic climate in Lake County in general it is not surprising we are not seeing that. However, I would expect more than the \$1.00 per person we are seeing.

STILL lots of people giving to big national organizations thinking we get some of the \$\$\$. Even after I explain that although those organizations may do some worthy work, their support is not being seen in their own community we still never manage to see a check from them. And I am never negative about where they do choose to give. Hard to compete with those flashy sad sappy Sara McLaughlin ads.

We try with ads in paper, on radio, word of mouth, newsletters, donation jars at functions etc.

The whole idea of being in animal welfare is still kind of “odd” here – well at least the good ole boys still think we are a bunch of bleeding hearts that want to stop hunting and ranching. But one of our biggest supporters here in the county is a business that deals in training people to use high powered weapons efficiently – if you know what I mean. So there you go. They are animal lovers and not from this area.

**6. Do you get donations from outside the county, how so?**

**Martina:** A little over one half of our donations come from outside the county. Mostly by meeting people at adoption events but also from past adopters and friends and family of those directly involved with OOHS and through social media outlets like Facebook. We also do different online fundraising events like Spay Day Online Photo Contest.

**7. All right, let's get personal cause, of course, that is what so much of this work is... you are a relative newcomer to Lake County (being transferred there by the Forest Service) -- do you find that you are treated differently than DJ, a native?**

**Martina:** I don't think I am treated differently due to that fact, at least I do not perceive that. I am treated differently because I have a different approach in dealing with people, mainly those that are looking to OOHS for help. I am straight forward, no fuss. I can empathize to a point but when there are real issues that are not logical to me I have a hard time interacting to our benefit.

....**And if so, do you two allocate your work to take advantage of that fact?** I tend to be the one who talks the “numbers” talk. The big picture. Statistics, effectiveness, science. I go do the

Rotary presentations, talk to the commissioners, write the grants, complete the grant reports. I interact with our donors to show what we are doing and how we are doing it. Protocol and procedure, why we do this and not that – my strength. DJ HATES numbers and statistics and protocol and procedure, I thrive on it. I am a scientist.

DJ is a true social welfare guru. She is so unbelievably skilled at knowing where someone “is” in their life. She deals with convincing people to spay and neuter, showing them how they can afford a co pay. She has the patience to talk to them about their lives and animals. In doing that she relates to them where they are and shows them how doing what we see as beneficial is also beneficial to them. If we walk up to a house and the people are very cooperative, we both go forward. If there is any trepidation, she takes the lead.

The interesting thing is we are slowly starting to blend into each other’s world. I know we could not do the things we are doing without both perspectives.

**8. You do a lot of work with feral cats -- is this a big problem all over the county or just in certain areas? Can you offer a general description of the problem?**

**Martina:** The problem is county wide although there is a different perspective in town vs out of town. Because we are a ranch/farm community people who think all the cats running around Lakeview are a problem see no problem with “barn cats” reproducing, dying, reproducing. And of course no problem giving the unfixed kittens away to people in town.....

Inside town, it is a problem town wide with some hotspots where there are lots of cats.

I think the lack of a low cost Spay Neuter program for so long was the start of the problem combined with the barn cats. The rural nature of our area lends itself to lots of community (AKA feral) cats. People have cats, they have kittens, they give away kittens, the kittens have kittens. Half the people move and leave them behind. Kind lady starts to feed them but can’t afford to get them fixed, more kittens.

Add to that the “country” logic that cats are not valued at all by most people and bullets are cheaper (and the fact that all that big talk from all those guys with guns does not mean any of them could or would shoot a cat) and then top it off with more barn cats.

No shelter so cats are never picked up by anyone .....

People caring for them are generally low income. Some hoarding too. I think there is a problem with seeing no light at the end of the tunnel for some people. I am always surprised at the few who spend countless dollars saving sick kittens but cannot afford to start having the cats fixed. It is in and of itself a reactive solution they choose.

The majority of the people we help with the mass TNR truly want it to end, but the thought of having to trap them (so many people are surprised at how many cats we can catch so easily) and then pay the vet full cost to fix them is too much. I personally could not afford it in many cases. People don’t realize how much is saved by taking care of it where there are one or two strays.



**9. We know you have been spearheading TNR --trap,neuter,release --operations with feral cats there. We have read lots of articles about these, some saying they "work", some saying they "don't work" --have you read these and what does your work suggest?**

I have read them, talked to the experts and read them again.

They are all correct TNR does not work and TNR does work.

TNR done sporadically (both temporally and spatially), unfocused and with a defined ending point does not work. You can fix 100 cats in 60 different locations once and you will have accomplished nothing from a population standpoint. It is a wasted effort stand alone. The other cats have already replaced the kittens those 60 would have had in a year.

TNR done in a mass targeted format does work. You need to get at least 70% altered to have a stagnant population. More to see a decline. You have to keep catching the new ones that show up, the new ones that people drop off. The effort decreases from a financial perspective when you are back in a year catching 2 cats instead of 25, but you have to be dedicated to going back. You have to combine this with a targeted effort (same area) of companion cat spays and neuters. You HAVE to keep going back to those areas.

Follow up outreach has shown there are very tangible positive benefits of the targeted TNR work we are doing. Less kittens, less nuisance behaviors, happier people caring for the cats, happier neighbors.

Trap and kill has immediate, visible reductions in cats, but long term ends up being a wasted effort. It also is not very humane and impacts people negatively .

Doing nothing does not work.



**10. How many cats have you TNR'd to date and what do the people in the areas have to say about this?**

**Martina:** To date we have TNR- TARGETED over 350 cats. People LOVE it. Even the skeptics are pleased. It has been one of the most positive projects we have done from an actual effectiveness and positive public relations standpoint.

The caretakers are happy there are no more dying kittens. The cats are healthier. They are not pouring money into cat food. The neighbors are happy there are no more dying kittens, less spraying and yowling, less cats in their flower beds. How do we know this? We send 4 volunteers to knock on doors in the first Targeted Area about 12 months after we first started, 3 months after our last effort. They had a survey and asked people the questions.

We have probably TNR'd another 150 cats since 2007 here and there but not during the targeted effort. We continue to do those for people if they want, you NEVER turn anyone away who wants to get a cat fixed. EVER! Sell a pint of blood if that is what it takes.



.....Anybody ever get mad at you? Yes,

- mad we are not taking them and killing them,
- mad their pet cat came home without his nuts and part of his ear clipped off,
- mad because they are sure we kept their favorite wild cat for ourselves.

I think there is suspicion of anyone who would put this much effort into this and not have some “thing” to gain. It is actually comical. Just what I need, 350 feral cats at my house, pretty sure I can find homes for all of those in no time. One has blue eyes ;-)

..... Anybody ever want to help?

Yes but it is usually more work than they want to do with animals they cannot touch. Again, everybody wants to walk a homeless dog and cuddle an abandoned kitten. Plus it is a dirty job. Plus it is hard for people to wrap their heads around the fact that these cats DO NOT want a warm lap to curl up on.



.....Have you ever been bitten? Yes, but not by a feral cat – by a “tame” pet cat. Several times.

Insanity = “doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different result”

**11. You have provided a "how to do TNR" in the protocols section, could you tell us a time or two when events have veered off of this straightforward, "how to" path? And how have you adapted?**

(Laughing....Don't get me started....) The caretaker who would not cooperate. She did not want us on her property or near her cats. So we caught the cats on the neighbor's property. It is just something you have to be ready for. It will not gain you any points in that person's mind, but the neighbors and 4 other people feeding the same cats will thank you. Plus the cat is better off and you have to remember that.

The caretaker who would not put her cats on a feeding schedule. When we did not catch all the cats as quickly as we told her we could – she said “see I told you that you couldn’t catch them”. She would believe NOTHING we told her. Eventually we caught the cats. We just had to set traps a gazillion times. ONE WORD – TWO SYLLABLES CatNip - Another two words – Drop Trap – Some other words – party poopers. I think some people who did nothing about the problem when it was manageable set themselves up to think the reason they did nothing is because it was an impossible situation to get a handle on. Then when you do it in a weekend it is an eye opener for them and it may make them feel a little foolish. The thing is, some of these situations, 3 stray cats, the people feeding them could have done something but it is easier to think there is nothing you can do. Then when there are 15 and it is a bigger challenge it may be a little hard to see it taken care of so quickly.

**12. This may seem ignorant/cruel/both ... ok it is, but educating some of our ignorance, countering some of our cruelty, is the point here anyway....don't the freezing cold winters pretty much "take care" of the animal overpopulation problem in your area?**

**Martina:** No it doesn't. One reason – companion animals. They are generally taken care of minimally to make it such that they live and do well through the winters. They are having no problems reproducing.

Pet Overpopulation has its roots in the companion animal world.

For dogs, well there are really no “feral” dog packs running around. Even the packs we hear about generally end up back at home each night for dinner. When they have their puppies they are doing it at “home” not out in the sagebrush. Abandoned animals, out in the desert they don't make it. Actually making the effort to “abandon” a dog is more effort than most people will make. They just let them roam around town. Eventually they get turned in as a stray and we take them or they are euthanized. Then the people go get another puppy.

Cats get a little more complicated. True companion cats are having litters in their owners' homes and are given away. Healthy for the most part. The cycle continues when some of them have kittens. Then you have some that are not fixed and left behind when people move. They become stray and eventually have litters that after a couple generations become feral. Even cats that get abandoned “out of town”, well most people doing that are really too lazy to take them far enough out where they will have no chance. They end up abandoned at barns, the last house before you are really in the forest. They find a house or a food dish. They live and if not fixed, reproduce.

Feral/barn kittens die, disease, cold, hunger, coyotes, owls. But not all of them, so more cats and kittens. Then you add the “rescuers” who take the feral kittens in when they are young enough to tame, they get given away and not fixed.....

Regardless, even if the cold winters DID result in dogs and cats having litters and those litters not making it. Well how humane is that? Why should THAT ever be OK, how is THAT the solution anyone could really live with? We do not see how allowing an animal population to regulate itself through suffering and death is ever a good answer. Not when spaying and

neutering not only ends that end of it, but also improves the life of the companion animals and the people.

**13. We hear you run a "pet food share" program in your county. What is your reasoning behind giving out food, where do you get it from, what kind of screening do you do for recipients, how long have you run this and what affect do you think you have achieved?**

**Martina:** We had an opportunity to get \$1,000 in grant funding to start one so we did. We get food from Wal Mart in Klamath Falls – donated damaged bags etc.

Our reasoning for doing this is that nothing gets people to come out and meet you like free stuff. And they do come. We usually never have enough cat food. Screening is somewhat limited. In a small town where everyone knows everyone most people are pretty honest about the need. One thing we ALL need to remember in this or any program is the difference between actual need versus perceived need, there is no difference. It's like if someone believes they saw a UFO, they did indeed see a UFO. If someone perceives they cannot afford to feed, spay neuter, vaccinate a pet, they can't.

What all Pet Food Share Participants must do is fill out a survey. It asks questions like how many pets they have, if they are fixed, where they got them, if they have had any litters, if they have ever used a low cost sn program etc etc. Information we need to make programs more effective. It also gives us info to pass along to grantors. Shows we are not just asking for support based on what we think, but on what we need to help pets and people in our community.

All pets must be fixed or they must work with OOHS to get them fixed. Of course as soon as you say you are going to breed your pet, no more pet food. We do not subsidize backyard breeders. Surprisingly most people we turn away because of this do not understand why we do this. We put no hard and fast limit on the number of animals they can have. However, as our relationships grow if we keep hearing about the new pet they got, we have a candid conversation with them. Usually the conversations we have with the people at the beginning make this a pretty rare instance. They just want to be reassured we are there to help all the animals THEY used to help by taking them in. It is amazing but most of these people are relieved that our SN, TNR and adoption programs are making it less likely THEY will need to take in another pet. And if they do get another pet they are right there to sign them up for sn. The alternative, we are taking the pet in which is WAY more costly than helping them get the pet fixed and giving them food once and awhile.

It is a monthly giveaway, first come first served. We do offer for feral cats if we have extra and they work with us to get the caught and fixed. We have run this since Fall of 2007.

We have achieved a face in the community, a relationship with people and pets we would have not met otherwise, many many spay and neuters, a regular place they know they can find us – given we have no facility. One thing I never ever expected. There are people who know WAY more about what other people need that we ever will. They tell us things about neighbors we

don't want to know but are helpful in doing the work we do. Each individual that comes to food share is a potential good will ambassador for OOHS. We all need those.

**.....And what do you say to people who comment that if someone can't afford pet food, they shouldn't have a pet?**

Funny, I remember when I use to say that. I say, yes, but they have them. Better they come to us for help where we can facilitate SN and better care than alternative – the animal becoming stray, having multiple litters etc. I talk the benefits of proactive versus reactive. Often the talk is in terms of real dollars and cents.

**14. Lastly, Martina, we have heard you state that the only way to run a successful rescue operation is to be able to say "no" when "no" should be said. We presume you say that because the default/obvious/kneejerk rescue response to a call for help is "yes"....but with limited resources and calls for help greater than those resources, "no" must also be a response. Could you please describe a couple "no" situations and how you personally felt about them, at the time and afterwards?**

Ahh the nos. OK, clarification. With every no there are many yeses. NEVER make no we can't help the final answer. You need to go where you can help. No we can't BLANK but we can BLANK.

I feel pretty good about these. I would say 80% of the people are good with this too. Funny thing is most who are NOT good with it are people that actually have the money to care for an animal or are people I would think would be able to understand why our all volunteer organization cannot help the way they initially think we can. No matter how many times I explain who we are and what we are capable of. It is like they are not listening to me or think I am just not capable of anything. Seriously, they make more than I do, are educated and functioning members of society but they want an immediate fix and the fix they have in their mind is THE only fix. They find a gazillion reasons it will not work no matter how many options I give them.

These are FRUSTRATING. And funny but when we do end up helping these people because we do have an opening, we NEVER see a dime in a donation from them. Where some of the people I know are hardly keeping it together will walk up to me in town and hand me \$5, \$10 or \$20 bucks when they have it.

One situation was a person of means who found a couple kittens. She lived out by the golf course, so probably barn kittens. I told her if she could hold onto them until they were 8 weeks old (they were about 6 weeks) we could get them fixed for a donation and she could turn them back out or we could transfer them to a larger rescue (8 weeks in the magic SN and transfer age). NOPE, she would feel bad turning them out. Well we could have you hold them till we have an opening or can get them to a bigger rescue. NOPE they had to go now because her dogs did not like them. Well we could provide you with a cat habitat, food, all the necessities needed. Nope. Not going to work. So she eventually took them to the vet clinic where they gave them away unaltered. One No –as in no I cannot drop everything I am doing right now to come make your life easier – but yes we still can help you if the kittens welfare is really your interest.

How did I feel. I felt fine. I know the gal has said we would not help her, many of these situations result in that. That bothers me to a point. But I ALWAYS remind people who mention these situations that we actually did say we could help, just not the help the people were willing to take.

The real deal with nos is that if the people actually have the best interest of the animal in mind, you can find a way to help them and the animal. Unfortunately if they are calling you the day before they move they only have their interests in mind. In those situations you have to accept that some animals are going to fall through the cracks. But if you keep dropping everything for every "crisis" situation, you will not be able to help others. You will get the reputation of bailing people out without them having any consequences. You will have to say no more because you are saying yes. Does that make sense?

*Remember, all those people who tell you they will just have to drown or shoot the animal you can't help them with won't actually do that. You will more than likely get a chance to eventually help the animal. They call back when they realize no one else is going to drop everything to come to the rescue either.*

**.....And to end positively because we feel positively about your work -- tell us a "yes" situation about which you are very very happy.**

WOW – really too many to count. Seriously there are two kinds: the immediate yeses and then the nos followed with yeses where the people cooperate.

An immediate yes that sticks with me. The vet clinic called us about a stray cat someone came in to have euthanized. He was a mess. Matted, skinny, upper respiratory. (Supposedly killing his chickens - although how this skinny sick cat could ever catch anything was a mystery). They were going to put him down as requested but he was super sweet, even as sick and disheveled as he was. I said yes immediately even though we did not really have any room. But the vet clinic is a great partner in our Companion Animal SN Program. That partnership has done more to improve the lives of companion cats and dogs in our area than anything. That cat ended up being THE BEST CAT – we all loved him and so does his new family.

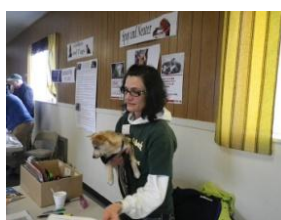
Let's see a dog one. Recently someone was moving – they had animals to rehome. We initially said all we could do was help them SN before they gave them away and courtesy list. One dog they already had promised to a friend -- a mastiff mix, unneutered. We offered to neuter him before he was given away. Initially they said the new owner wanted to breed him, but then we got a call that the new owner would like him neutered – BONUS. I showed up with SN Application in hand just as he was getting handed off. I mentioned they should probably have him neutered first before he went into a home with an unneutered male and unspayed female. Nope, they knew it would all be fine and they would just take him down for his neuter appointment the following week. I did tell them if it fell through we would take him. This was not the kind of dog you wanted out in the community being passed around. He was going to end up in a bad situation and possibly making lots of puppies. Well they did indeed eventually call to say he did not get along with the other unneutered male in the new home. So off he went to get neutered and board till we came up with plan b – as we had no foster homes. I called a past

adopter who mentioned they were looking for a new addition. They had mentioned a mastiff as a potential fit. I was concerned about the fact he did not have a good interaction with the un neutered male and the male we had adopted to them was a strong personality. So we made a deal, they would spend a week going down to the vet twice a day to walk him. They would eventually take turns bringing the other dogs down to meet him and if all went well, do a slow introduction to the home. After two weeks, he went home for good and is a great addition to the family. Thank goodness because if that went bust I did not have a plan c.



**31Paws:** Thanks, Martina...even though we have followed your work (and received and read your stressed out but always hilarious emails!), we have learned quite a bit of the “nuts and bolts” of OOHS’ great local embedded work – you were doing it before it had a name and we are sure you will keep doing it and make its name better and better and better. Thank you for all you do.

## DJ



**31Paws:** We know DJ through Martina’s descriptions and praises. Every team needs special members – an organizer, a creator, a mouthpiece, a wit, a connector, a worker, a heart, and a glue-creating soul. Being a locally raised woman, with a local government job, living in the county seat in a low population county, DJ is at the center of most of Lake county’s people-centered events. At various times, she has filled almost all the key roles for the OOHS. You just can’t help animals if you don’t also know, and know how to talk with the people....and this is what DJ does without peer. Time to ask her some questions.

**1. DJ, you’re a Lake County native and well placed in both your job and the community to know people. This is a very vast county (8,000 square miles) and a small population**

**(around 8,000) people -- could you give us a general description of Lake County and the people's lives with companion animals in your county?**

**DJ:** Lake County is the Second largest county in Oregon with the highest rate of poverty in the state. I worked in low income programs prior to my involvement with OOHS (heating, housing, food programs) and I have found that the majority of households receiving services are pet owners, many with minimal resources.

**2. What is the main problem that you see with companion animals in your county (and why there is a need for proactive rescue) – maybe disease, unwanted animals, lack of care basics?**

**DJ:** The main problem is the lack of education. Being so remote, folks are unaware of programs or projects that bigger cities are able to offer. It is typical that a pet might be taken to another humane Society with a high rate of euthanasia. These are deaths about which the animal surrenderers are unaware.



**3. How much of the animal problems are caused by lack of money, how much are caused by lack of awareness of pet needs, how much are weather or travel issues?**

**DJ:** This answer has a few parts: #1 -- With the current “economic crisis” money is an issue. The costs of fuel, heat and groceries -- especially in remote areas -- are on the rise. If a pet owner is already choosing between food and medication, chances are, pet care is not budgeted. #2 -- There is a lack of municipal involvement enforcing ordinances (which support stray dog boarding) and proactive projects concerning animal over population, breeding and vaccines and licensing. #3 -- “Out of sight-out of mind...” Lake County has no history of any animal welfare. No shelter, pound or paid animal control officer. Therefore, most residents are unaware of the

actual problem or need.



**4. What percentage, in your estimation, of cats and dogs are altered in your county? What do people do with litters of pups and kittens that their pets produce?**



**DJ:** I would estimate that less than half of Lake County's companion animals are altered. The most common scenario with unwanted litters is a "FREE PUPPIES/KITTENS" sign in the local grocery store parking lot. Numerous residents claim that they have acquired an animal that was "dumped".

**5. We know you are in charge of the spay/neuter portion of OOHS' efforts -- how do you identify candidates for this program? Do you have different approaches to different types of people and situations? Please describe them.**

**DJ:** Generally, I am the one approached by the public. In a small town, it seems typical for people to identify case managers by their job. Many people assume that I am employed by OOHS. I am referred to by clients as well as business people as "the cat lady" and I do not own a cat.

As far as my approach regarding spay/neuter. Each case is as unique as the person involved. It is most often that I am asking them how I can help them? How can I benefit them? This makes them feel important as a responsible pet owner.

Also, it is most important for OOHS to be present at all community events, such as Health Fairs, Holiday Bazaars and numerous other local festivals. We try to attract folks to the OOHS booth by awarding them prizes, pet gifts or something free. This is essential to outreach. I address all walks of life when asking if they are pet owners and casually asking if their pet is fixed, a family member's pet is fixed, if the neighbor's pet is fixed.

Getting applications completed, or a list of names and numbers is a **must** for follow up. Again, an advantage to a small town, knowing everybody!

**6. What are the reasons people give you for not spay/neutering their animals?**

**DJ:** It seems that men have a problem with taking away their male pets' manly-hood. What do I say in response? I point out the risk of testicular cancer, that spay/neuter helps prevent roaming. In the case of cats, I always use the obvious. Fixed cats help keep unfixed cats from moving in. It cuts down on fighting and spraying.

**.....Has anyone ever gotten mad at you?**

**DJ:** Yes, on many occasions.

**.....Have you ever gotten mad at anyone?**

**DJ:** Yes, on even more occasions.

**..... Could you tell us one or two stories that illuminate your approaches?**

**DJ:** A fellow volunteer gets a call about numerous dogs, cats and kittens in a small house. Upon surrender of some of the cats, it turns out the kitties have feline paratinitis. The kitties suffer and eventually die after numerous trips to the vet. After years of struggling with this household introducing new pets into a contaminated home, we convince them that we can no longer help with food or surrenders until they have all pets spayed/neutered. As a result, this struggle has finally resolved itself! The homeowner (mother), her daughter, the grandfather and grandson are all recipients of spay/neuter assistance and food share for pets. They brag that “*DJ told us NO MORE ANIMALS*”. A generational negative, has now turned positive, with education and a little tough love attitude.

## **7. Where are the spay/neuter operations done?**

**DJ:** Local Lake County Veterinarians perform surgery and contribute to the SNOOPI (Spay-Neuter Oregon Outback Pets Initiative) Program. Lakeview vet contributes 1/3 of the cost to help low income pet owners with spay/neuter. Another local Veterinarian contributes numerous hours to a feral cat project. Also, a monthly “SNIP TRIP” is made to neighboring Klamath County 97 miles west of Lakeview, in which 8 to 25 stray cats are loaded on OOHS’ bus monthly traveling two hrs each way to be spayed and neutered at a low cost rate by a partnering Klamath Falls vet.

### **.....How do the animals get there?**

**DJ:** The pet owner is responsible for getting companion pets to SNOOPI appointments. I take vacation days to drive cats/kittens to Klamath Falls and return the cats to care takers. What portion are cats? 75% cats. What portion are dogs? 25% dogs.



### **.....Do you worry about the quality of their surgery-aftercare?**

**DJ:** There is some concern with re releasing cats into their colony immediately after surgery, but arrangements are made with the community and caretakers to monitor and keep track of each cat altered. The veterinarians that participate in the S/N projects are experienced and professional. OOHS is confident and happy with the after surgery care.



## **8. How much are the spay/neuters?**

**DJ:** OOHS is charged a special rate of: \$105 female dog, \$90 male dog, \$70 female cat, \$59 male cat

**...How much do the people pay?**

**DJ:** OOHS asks for \$50 for dogs, a donation for pit bulls and pit mix. \$35 for cats. As stated before, every scenario is different, and co pays may be waived in emergency and urgent situations.

**.....Is it hard to ask for, and get, copays? Any tips?**

**DJ:** In most cases, people are more than happy to make a co payment. It is suggested in a positive way. If a pet owner, caretaker is unwilling to make a donation or co pay, I compare our suggested donation amount to the full price cost of a vet and reiterate how spay neuter is going to benefit them and their pet.

**9. This kind of activity is as much about people as it is their animals....do you see that your work in this area has affected changes in how people view or treat their animals -- either individually or as a community?**

**DJ:** In my experience, it seems that people value their pet more if they have invested money into spay/neuter and vet care. Simple suggestions for problem solving in both the community and individual households has gone a long way, and I do believe I have witnessed improvement.



**10. Thanks for taking the time to answer these questions. We really appreciate your insights. To conclude we want to ask kind of a funny question, but one that comes up from other people interested in, but not doing, this sort of work.....and you're a great person to ask. Is this work hard, DJ? Why or why not? And how has it affected your life in Lake county?**

**DJ:** Yes, hard work indeed. Hard, yet rewarding. It is easy to burn out on other people's problems. "Programs" attract people in crisis. The rewards far outweigh the burn out. Helping others helps me. When those less fortunate are given an opportunity to contribute to the good of the community and an animal, it empowers them and teaches them to be a more responsible individual. It helps build self esteem and most importantly spreads "the word" about the care of animals. If I can encourage one person to help one kitten in a world filled with despair, it makes all the trials of animal rescue worth it to me. Educating the community, the county as a whole is an overwhelming thought, but I believe that OOHS is well on its way to a solution! With the help of dedicated volunteers and a supportive Board, I believe there will be change for Lake county

animals and their people. I will always be an animal rescue/humane society volunteer no matter who, what, where life takes me. It has changed my life and educated me as much as it has the clients we serve.



**31Paws:** Eloquently put, DJ...helping others help yet others has embedded in it, its own reward. Thank you for doing what you do and answering our questions so others can hear of your work. We wish you continued success and look forward to hearing more.