

ICAM conference 2025 Day 5 - Questions and Answers

Presentation	Question	Answer	Answer Name
5.2	Any study on the effect of routine/massive spay/neutering on the genetic pool (diversity) of this species?	Hi Joao - I have not come across any studies, but then I have also not done a thorough search. I understand there are some examples of intensive sterilisation projects limiting the gene pool of specific breeds of dogs within a focused area - but we should remember that as a species, dogs have very wide genetic diversity - its when people selectively breed to emphasise certain traits that gene pools become limited. I would think this selective and controlled breeding by people has a far greater impact on reducing genetic diversity than sterilisation efforts.	Elly Hiby
5.2	awesome! how can we access the AMRRIC accredited training?	Whereabouts are you based Irene?	Jenny Turton
5.2	Dr Jenny Turton: does AMRRIC have any plans to expand their work into southern territories of Australia?	We focus on rural and remote Indigenous communities, where there are most of in NT, Qld, WA and parts of SA. We would consider Indigenous communities in other parts of Australia also if requested	Jenny Turton
5.2	Dr Jenny Turton: Great presentation! I'm curious as to how you measure the impact of AMRRIC's work, or evaluate your success?	Thank you Karla. Great question. The accredited skill sets will have formal knowledge and practical skills assessment. We measure impact through improved animal health and welfare in particular. We also do a lot of educational work and evaluate this through teacher feedback. Happy to answer in more detail if you wanted to get in touch: jenny.turton@amrric.org	Jenny Turton

5.3

That case study was really compelling — where else has Cat Friendly Homing been used, and what results are people seeing?

Great question. Let me give a quick overview of the Cat Friendly Homing learning pathway. It starts with our Cat friendly Homing Foundations e-learning course, launched last December, which over 700 people have now completed. The second phase is our free Coaching Programme, which has been running for around four years. It predates the e-learning course, which we later developed to help scale the model and make the foundations more accessible to a wider audience.

We've now supported over 80 organisations across 14 countries through the Coaching Programme — from national charities to municipal shelters, local independent rescues and foster networks. Feedback has been very positive. Where before-and-after data exists, participants report positive changes including shorter stays, more cats helped, healthier cats, and cats appearing more relaxed in care. Many teams also say they feel more confident in their decision-making.

Most of the evidence so far is anecdotal, largely because many organisations didn't have systems to track outcomes before starting. But a ripple effect of Cat Friendly Homing has been helping them build those systems. Vanessa, who you heard from in the talk, is now supporting 13 RSPCA branches through the programme and formally tracking impact — we hope to share more data next year.

Personally, I've experienced the impact first-hand. In shelters I managed previously, we integrated the essential components of the CFH model. We reduced occupancy to provide better care and homing increased by around 30%, length of stay reduced by around half, and rates of upper respiratory disease decreased by around 80%.

So, while the evidence base is still growing, the results so far are meaningful.

Lindsey Quinlan

5.3

Question for International cat care -how to you encourage volunteers to be engaged and also do you support them with any kind of incentives?

Great question as this is often a challenge. While iCatCare doesn't run volunteer programmes directly, we work with many organisations around the world that do, and we've seen some clear themes that help volunteers stay engaged and motivated.

1. Show the impact

Help volunteers see the difference they make. Share real outcomes — stories, photos, or stats — so they know their time matters.

2. Invite them in

A welcoming environment with opportunities to learn and contribute are essential. Involve volunteers in organisational communications, listen to their ideas, and ask for feedback. Feeling included builds ownership and motivation.

3. Support what they value

People volunteer for different reasons — to help animals, build skills, feel connected, or find purpose during difficult personal times. Understand what matters to them and respond accordingly. Where possible, offer training, certificates, or references to help people grow.

4. Be honest about the role

Set clear expectations from the start. If the role involves a lot of cleaning, say so, and try to balance it with something they find personally rewarding, even for a short time. Clarity builds trust and prevents disappointment.

5. Support and Celebrate

Volunteering should feel good and be doable. Small gestures like covering travel costs, providing refreshments, a quiet break space, can make a big difference. Celebrating your volunteers matters too. whether it's a heartfelt thank-you. a

Lindsey Quinlan

5.3

You said Cat Friendly Homing helps stretched teams — how does it make things easier in practice?

Yes, and I'm really glad you picked up on that. In stretched teams, the pressure to do more with less can be overwhelming. CFH is designed to reduce pressure, not add to it. It helps teams make smarter, more intentional decisions — like only admitting cats who truly need to be there, working within optimum occupancy, and creating clear outcome plans. That means less time spent on avoidable cases, less stress, and better care for each cat.

Lindsey Quinlan

It can feel counterintuitive, but doing less at any one time often leads to achieving more. Teams have told us that once they got started and through the change process, which can be bumpy, CFH didn't feel like extra work and instead it made them more effective and their existing work more manageable.

5.3

I have been rescuing, sterilizing, rehabilitating cats since 2016, on my own.. Above 2000 cats were under my care. Above 100 aggressive strays have been domesticated and have found homes. I currently have 3 really aggressive ones that I am working on simultaneously. So I am a bit confused about what is being said.

Thank you for being here — it's clear how deeply you care and how much effort you've put in. One of the pillars of Cat Friendly Homing is respecting the cat as they are and providing both the journey through our care and the outcome that best supports their wellbeing.

When a cat is behaving aggressively, it's communicating something — fear, frustration, or pain. That behaviour is a message and our job is to listen to it. What CFH encourages is stepping back and asking: What is this experience like for the cat? What does this cat need from me right now?

Cat Friendly Homing shares your intention to help cats and offers tools and frameworks to support that care in a way that equally prioritises their physical health and mental wellbeing.

Lindsey Quinlan

If you're curious to explore more, we'd love to invite you to check out our free course and resources. You might find they complement the work you're already doing or offer a fresh perspective on how to make things even better for the cats in your care.

More info can be found on our website [here](#), including joining our Unowned Cat Community via our newsletter.

https://icatcare.org/working-with-unowned-cats?utm_source=Poster&utm_medium=Event&utm_campaign=CFSUC+newsletter&utm_term=Congress

5.3

How do you balance Cat Friendly Homing with the really hard decisions — like when there just aren't enough homes, or resources are too stretched? Isn't it sometimes impossible to meet every cat's individual needs?

That's such a powerful and honest question — and one we hear often.

The reality is, we can't always give every cat a great outcome; but Cat Friendly Homing helps us make the best possible decisions with the resources we have.

A key part of CFH is a decision-making framework that supports teams through those tough calls. It helps ensure we're thinking about what's right for each individual cat, challenging assumptions, and not just defaulting to what's always been done.

That might mean admitting fewer cats when capacity is stretched, offering support in the community instead of taking a cat in, finding creative options for inbetweeners who don't suit traditional rehoming, or, when no good outcome is possible, making the difficult decision that euthanasia is better than prolonged distress or suffering.

CFH doesn't avoid the hard decisions — it helps us face them in a thoughtful, structured way.

Lindsey Quinlan

5.3	<p>Question about Cat Friendly Homing - What do you recommend for shelters to do when there are newly submitted cats with FIV+ or FELV+ and the shelter doesn't have any capacity to keep cats with these condition because of concerns with disease transmission within the population. Thank you and I appreciate your good work with CFH!</p>	<p>Great question, Cica — and unfortunately not one with an easy answer! A few thoughts:</p> <p>iCatCare's iCatConnect online conference this November will be exploring some of these difficult questions, so please do check that out, if you can.</p> <p>We're also currently developing decision-making resources to help people working with unowned cats navigate exactly these kinds of situations for FIV+ or FeLV+ cats. They don't provide ready-made answers, but they do offer the tools and information needed to reach the best possible decision — even when none of the options feel ideal. Often, we just need to balance risks and benefits and choose the least harmful path.</p> <p>More broadly, a key element of Cat Friendly Homing model is recognising that we all work with limited resources. The reality is, we can't always give every cat what it needs. CFH supports us to make the best decisions we can, with the resources available.</p> <p>When no better options exist, it may mean making the incredibly hard call that humane euthanasia is kinder than potentially putting other cats at significant risk of harm.</p> <p>Lindsey Quinlan</p>
5.3	<p>What is your opinion on cat cafes and that kind of institutions?</p>	<p>I can't speak for any other organisations, but cat cafes are mentioned in Cats Protections Cat Manifesto https://www.cats.org.uk/what-we-do/campaigning/manifesto</p> <p>Claire Roberts</p>

<p>5.3</p> <p>What is your opinion on cat cafes and that kind of institutions?</p>	<p>That's a great question, and often a controversial one!</p> <p>Cat cafés often appear appealing on the surface - a space where people can enjoy time with cats, and in some cases even adopt them. But from a welfare perspective, creating an environment that genuinely meets cats' needs in this kind of setting is extremely challenging.</p> <p>Cats need choice and control over their interactions with people, with other cats, and with their environment. That's difficult to achieve in a café setting where there's a steady stream of unfamiliar people, other cats, different smells, unexpected sights and noises, and varying expectations for interaction. It's rarely the calm, predictable environment that cats prefer.</p> <p>What is sometimes overlooked is that feelings of confinement and loss of control can still exist in a cat café just as much as in a shelter. It might look more spacious or home-like, but in many ways, it's still a shared enclosure - just a bigger, multiple-occupancy space - with lots of well-meaning visitors who may want to cuddle the cats whether they like it or not.</p> <p>Some cats may appear to cope, but that doesn't mean they're thriving. Cats are masters at tolerating situations they can't escape; but that tolerance can mask stress and discomfort. Most cats don't naturally choose to live in groups of unrelated individuals, so even the dynamics between the cats can be a significant source of stress.</p> <p>Of course, with thoughtful design, careful selection of cats, and robust welfare oversight, some cafés may make it work better than others. But it takes a genuinely cat-centred approach to ensure the cats' wellbeing isn't compromised.</p> <p>Lindsey Quinlan</p>
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5.3

Again this is incorrect. Cat they watch others and then learn and do the same.... This is one of the techniques I used to domesticate very aggressive cats.

I have 9 years of experience with cats.. With treating, with TNR, with rehabilitation, with rehoming. There are many things you say that I do not agree with. The only cats that are caged in my shelter are those who are in quarantine or under specific treatments. Many of these stray cats, or feral cats can have a 360 degree change in their attitude. I have countless success stories. They watch, they observe, they learn..

Hi Maria, Really appreciate you being part of the conversation. If you're curious, we'd love for you to check out some of the Cat Friendly Homing materials — they're designed exactly for the work you're doing, especially in complex situations.

https://icatcare.org/working-with-unowned-cats?utm_source=Poster&utm_medium=Event&utm_campaign=CFSUC+newsletter&utm_term=Congress Lindsey Quinlan

Also, please feel free to reach out to me directly - lindsey.quinlan@icatcare.org

All my best

<p>5.3</p> <p>Lindsey - just want to say thank you for explaining that we sometimes have to make those very difficult decisions about not starting a rehoming center but supporting them in other ways instead. Any advice on how to better explain to the community that not every single animal should be brought to the shelter, and we should allow the animals to coexist with us on the streets?</p>	<p>Thank you so much; I really appreciate that.</p> <p>A helpful starting point I often use when talking to the public is the way we coexist with wild animals like foxes, monkeys, hedgehogs, coyotes, or kangaroos, depending on where we live. We may support them, but we don't put them in cages or try to rehome them. Some cats are like that too — domestic in species (<i>Felis catus</i>) but living wild. Trying to tame or rehome them is dangerous.</p> <p>Many people genuinely want to help, but there's a strong assumption that "help" means rescue and rehoming. We can gently challenge that by explaining that not every cat needs a shelter, and instead that care can often happen right where they are by giving them practical options: targeted neutering, monitoring, providing shelter, feeding (neutered cats only), or simply keeping an eye out. The aim is to build the community's role in care, not replace it.</p> <p>Of course, some people just want the cats gone, especially if they're causing mess or conflict. In those situations, the goal is to solve the problem and not just remove the cats – by neutering to prevent breeding, adjusting feeding stations, and improving waste management. Helping people understand these approaches are much more effective than relocating cats to shelters anyway as it avoids the "vacuum effect" of more cats moving in.</p> <p>Lindsey Quinlan</p>
<p>5.3</p> <p>Hi Lindsey, what is a recommended LOS after which a previously free-roaming cat can still be returned the environment as a street cat? Thanks!</p>	<p>The shorter the better, Dr Lin. It may depend on local legislation, but ideally we aim to return a previously free-roaming cat within 24 to 48 hours (max). Feel free to reach out to us at unownedcats@icatcare.org if you'd like to continue the conversation.</p> <p>Lindsey Quinlan</p>

5.4	do you have specific strategy for cats in urban and rural areas	<p>We find approaches to managing cats need to be place-based, they need to focus on the specific barriers and challenges in the area and tailor the approach to that area. Nonetheless the approaches that are needed are more or less the same in urban and in rural areas. Accessible desexing!! What differs are the stakeholders involved, the services that are available and how to access them. We do find we need a much higher intervention intensity (number of cats you need to desex per human population) in rural compared to urban areas because of high levels of migration of cats from the rural areas into the residential areas.</p>	Gemma Ma
5.4	'@RSPCA, where can we access the information resources?	<p>https://www.rspcansw.org.au/keeping-cats-safe-at-home/</p>	Gemma Ma
5.4	How do you manage when an owned cat is being introduced into a neutering campaign designed to non owned cats?	<p>Great question. We target our targeted desexing programs toward both unowned cats AND owned cats. However, we are very conscious of trying to avoid desexing cats for cat owners who would have arranged for their cat to be desexed anyway (which is >90% of cat caregivers in Australia), because desexing these cats will quickly use up all our resources! This is why we are very strategic with our promotion - we do not advertise our programs widely. We use our stakeholder networks to help identify the people who are struggling, looking in particular for the households with multiple cats. Then once we've found those multicat sites we work hard over the long term to make sure we get ALL of the cats at each site desexed. We also work with the caregivers to try and address the underlying reasons the cats ended up there in the first place. These reasons differ between different areas. For example it might be inaccessibility of veterinary services, it might be lack of options for surrender, etc.</p>	Gemma Ma

5.4	I'd be interested to know if most Australian animal NGOs view owned cat roaming similarly. Where i'm from, animal NGOs often encourage roaming as it's considered a natural behavior (and many also downplay predation by cats)	Opinions about cats and how they should be managed in Australia vary widely. There are many people in Australia who believe strongly that our native wildlife should be protected from cat predation, hence many owned cats are kept indoors. There are nonetheless also many cat caregivers who believe strongly in their cat's right to roam and that this is necessary for their wellbeing. At RSPCA we sit somewhere in the middle. We recommend that cats should be prevented from roaming away from home to keep them safe - many cats are injured or killed on the road in Australia and roaming cats face many other risks as well. But we also acknowledge that safe outdoor access can be very beneficial, and that it can be difficult to meet all a cats' needs if they live exclusively indoors. This is also on a background of increasing regulation around cats roaming - more areas of Australia are mandating that cats must be contained to owner premises every year.	Gemma Ma
5.4	Love the idea of getting people to notice stray cats - especially children who are more likely to notice them - and then letting them know how best to help.	Absolutely. In Australia, when a stray cat shows up in a neighbourhood 9 times out of 10 the community resolves the situation without requiring the intervention of an animal welfare organisation or council. Someone will notice the cat, get them desexed, adopt them, or find them a home with a neighbour/friend/family member. This is what we want to encourage! That people notice that one cat and act to help them before that one cat turns into 50 cats. Which means organisations like RSPCA can focus on helping that 10% of people who don't have the resources (money, transport, physical ability to catch the cat etc.) to desex the cat and find them a home.	Gemma Ma
5.4	How do you find managing cats who can become frustrated which can escalate to aggression in the confinement of a home? Do you recommend enclosed gardens?	Yes, this can be tricky. Many cats do become frustrated with containment, especially if they are not offered enough opportunities to engage in climbing, scratching and especially predatory behaviour. We advocate for providing cats with safe outdoor access, for example using cat enclosures, modified fencing, harness training, or just supervised outdoor time. There are a range of resources on our website that cover this https://www.rspcasw.org.au/keeping-cats-safe-at-home/	Gemma Ma
5.6	Was there a reason you went for 5 months rather than younger?	Absolutely! Our thinking was that change is hard -- especially for our veterinarians who have been recommending spay/neuter at 6 months or later for so long. The goal is that this small shift -- just 4 weeks -- will be received more openly than a larger jump (like 6 months to 8 weeks!) and still have a positive impact on cat populations.	Brianna Lovell Myers

5.6	How do you educate the vets? Where we live there's the problem that they don't do surgery on cats under 2 kg weight. Which is usually above 6 months of age.	For the local vets it's rather about skills (anesthesia, actual surgery - everything is tiny) than about age. Is there anything that can be done about it?	Annabell Gottschalk
5.6	Question for Brianna : what is the earliest age at which a cat can be spayed without any risk or long term effect (shyness...) according to science ?	The widespread recommendation here is 2 months, 2 lbs! :)	Brianna Lovell Myers
5.6	Thank you. Where can we find the scientific resources stating this age ?	Hi Agnes! The recommendations from our task force include references to the science. There are also a number of resources in our Learning Library here: https://www.unitedspayalliance.org/feline-fix-by-five/get-involved/learning-library/	Brianna Lovell Myers
5.6	Question for Brianna : what is the earliest age at which a cat can be spayed without any risk or long term effect (shyness...) according to science ?	Just a little personal experience: I got 3 kittens (2 male, 1 female) neutered with 3 months of age last year (from a foreign vet ;)) and they are all thriving. I notice that their character is much calmer towards other cats than from cats that got neutered later.	Annabell Gottschalk
5.6	To Fix by Five.- Pregnant and Five months old. What is the ideal age for pregnancy for dogs and cats?	I'm not certain of the ideal age for pregnancy -- but we do know that cats can be safely spayed/neutered at 2 months/2 pounds. If more folks were able to Fix by Five months we would see far fewer unwanted litters.	Brianna Lovell Myers
5.6	Do you have anesthesia protocols available, without gas?	Hi Audrey, you may find this helpful https://www.cats.org.uk/help-and-advice/information-for-vets/early-kitten-neutering-vets	Ian MacFarlane
5.6	Do you have anesthesia protocols available, without gas?	Thanks, Ian! That's a great resource. We often refer to the protocols from the ASPCA as well: https://www.aspcapro.org/resource/spayneuter-guidelines	Brianna Lovell Myers
5.6	How do you go about identifying what the barrier(s) is/are to changing behaviour amongst veterinary professionals?	Hi Melissa! Good question. For us, it's been a combination of the research/studies that have come out about this issue, and the conversations and relationships we've intentionally developed. It's been a lot of listening, keeping an open mind to meet folks where they are, and trying to be as understanding as possible.	Brianna Lovell Myers

5.6	Many Vets use tracheal tubes during spay/neuter in Japan, which can be a barrier to spay for kittens. I understand that masks are used during kitten spay/neuter, so how do you teach that safety?	Hi Miyuki! That's a great question. If you want to reach out to me at brianna@unitedspayalliance.org I'd be glad to connect you with vets who can provide advice on this.	Brianna Lovell Myers
5.6	We've also learned in the UK that with early/kitten spay and neuter, you really need to keep at it with the veterinary professions in terms of promotion and nudging. The professions do seem to lapse back to 6 months when the "noise" about early neuter reduces....	Yes! You definitely need to keep at it. We've found that peer pressure is helpful -- if the clinic down the street is doing it, then all of a sudden, it feels a little more important to do it, too!	Brianna Lovell Myers
5.6	Hi Brianna - Are there any known long-term behavioral effects in cats that are neutered at 5 weeks of age?	Hi Lorna! Good question. Not that I am aware of. In fact, we've seen that there are positive behavioral impacts for early spay/neuter, including a reduction in those "nuisance" behaviors like yowling and spraying that can lead to cats being abandoned or surrendered to shelters.	Brianna Lovell Myers