

Mountaineer Spay Neuter Assistance Program, Inc

The M-SNAP Story

In 2007, the Monongalia County Canine Adoption Center, a mandatory spay/neuter facility, received 2,851 homeless dogs, cats, puppies and kittens over the course of the year. The vast majority of these animals were healthy but homeless. Sadly, the Center was forced to put 1,947 of those unwanted animals to death, because there were not enough homes for them all.

In December, 2007, a small group of people, alarmed and saddened by these statistics, began discussing ways to help reduce the over-population of dogs and cats in Monongalia County, and alleviate the need for killing so many homeless or abandoned pets. We committed ourselves to providing financial support to help Mon County residents spay and neuter their pets, and to raising community awareness of spay/neuter as the most viable and humane solution to control the county's dog and cat populations. We founded a new organization: the Mountaineer Spay Neuter Assistance Program, Incorporated (M-SNAP). We defined our mission: to make spay/neuter the most common solution to reducing the numbers of homeless, abandoned, and feral animal populations in Monongalia County, eliminating euthanasia as a necessary means of population control.

On March 6, 2008, M-SNAP became a West Virginia Corporation. By October of 2008, we were providing financial assistance for spay/neuter to the residents of Monongalia County through our Voucher Program. We have joined hands, worked hard, and made rapid and rewarding progress. Our organization has grown to 67 dues paying members. We are proud of the growing success of our all-volunteer efforts to raise community awareness, network with other animal welfare organizations, distribute information, and raise funds for our cause.

Our desired outcome, the reduction of the domestic animal population in Monongalia County, is an on-going and complex project. We know that the benefits of our work must start small but will increase over time. We believe that the greater the community involvement, the more quickly our goals will be met, and have targeted our efforts at education and awareness with this in mind.

We realize that this is a project with no end. While we can provide spay and neuter assistance and information, we cannot compel pet owners to fix their animals. However, we hope to duplicate the results of other, pro-active spay/neuter programs across the country that have successfully reduced the number of animals being killed at local shelters.

All residents of Monongalia County will benefit from a successful spay/neuter program. Fewer abandoned animals contribute to safer, healthier communities. The tax dollars we now spend to manage, house, and euthanize unwanted animals can be diverted to more positive, productive endeavors. There are many articles stating the benefits to the longevity and health of the pets as well. We are fixing Mon County, one pet at a time!

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Activities from Incorporation to Present

M-SNAP hit the ground running in three areas: fund-raising, networking, and community education. We established a Non-Permanent and Pass-Through Fund with The Greater Morgantown Community Trust (GMCT) in May, 2008, to receive tax-deductible cash gifts, and we began actively raising funds. GMCT has been instrumental in our fund-raising efforts thus far, and we look forward to a long association.

Our fund-raising activities have included the sale of tickets for the PGA/Nationwide Players Cup Tour, held at the nationally recognized Pete Dye Golf Course. We have held three successful yard sales, sold handmade crafts at three local craft fairs, sold Enjoy Entertainment Coupon books that feature coupons for local businesses, and received a generous offer from the local newspaper to receive a percentage of all new subscriptions that we sell. Also, we became an Amazon Associate, which gives us a portion of the proceeds on anything purchased from Amazon.com via our M-SNAP web page portal. We held a two-day pet photo event, and participated in a Dining-to-Donate fundraiser offered by Applebee's Restaurant.

In addition to these activities, we are identifying sources and pursuing grant funding to support our efforts and increase the number of spay/neuters we are able to underwrite. We are proud to report that we have secured grants thus far from the Greater Morgantown Community Trust, the Weldon Family Trust, the Cesar and Ilusion Millan Foundation, and the Greg Biffle Foundation.

We are excited about the numerous interactions with WVU that we have begun. We participated in WVU's 2008 Community Wellness Panel. We also became a community partner with the West Virginia University Center for Civic Engagement. This affiliation is a boon to M-SNAP's educational outreach efforts, and provides exposure for University students to a variety of volunteer activities. A group of CCE students held an M-SNAP informational outreach event at the Mountainlair on the WVU campus in November. In addition, M-SNAP volunteers are currently working with law students from the West Virginia University (WVU) College of Law's Entrepreneurial Legal Clinic to complete our 501(c)(3) application.

In addition to our work with WVU, we have actively initiated dialogue with other area animal welfare organizations and community groups. Awareness raising and education through community outreach is a core M-SNAP objective. We are working hard to educate Monongalia County residents about the importance of spay/neuter in a number of ways. Our Community Outreach Committee held its first Story Time at the Morgantown Public Library. They discussed spay/neuter using dog and cat puppets named Nip and Tuck, read a wonderful story, and helped children complete a "take home" craft for their parents.

Community support and awareness of M-SNAP continue to flourish. Eight area veterinarians now accept our vouchers as payment in full for spay/neuter. We are grateful for the support and responsiveness of these professionals. One of our members was recognized among the Top 100 Most Influential People named by the Morgantown Dominion Post and has brought our new organization to public attention. The United Way of Monongalia and Preston Counties selected another M-SNAP volunteer as "Volunteer of

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the Month". A local sign company donated an M-SNAP banner that has been displayed over busy streets, and the Dominion-Post donated the design and space for a spay/neuter ad to run several months. Our members built a wonderful float that appeared before huge crowds in the WVU Homecoming Parade. Our webpage was designed by a volunteer and is being hosted, free of charge, by another M-SNAP member (<http://www.m-snap.org>).

Planned activity and goals

We have arranged for a variety of public events to celebrate the national Spay Day activities in February, culminating with the first annual Morgantown Spay Neuter Day, sponsored by M-SNAP. We arranged an Open House at the county shelter, a spay/neuter rallies, and other events to promote the benefits of spay/neuter in our communities. We see this as a great beginning to our efforts to raise awareness of the benefits of spay/neuter in 2009. One of the most important components of public outreach is education, and we will promote spay/neuter awareness in public schools and our local institutions of higher education, partner with student clubs and youth groups to assist in developing and delivering curriculum to promote our spay/neuter campaign, and take advantage of other quality resources made available by national animal welfare organizations.

Our founding corps of volunteers is currently defining projects, refining our policies and procedures, identifying additional revenue sources, planning outreach and education events, recruiting new members, and setting new goals. We have four standing work committees – Membership, Fund Raising, Community Outreach and Action, each supporting M-SNAP objectives.

We plan to fund M-SNAP taking a multi-layered approach: combining community-based fund-raising, e-commerce opportunities, and grants. By cultivating multiple sources of revenue, we can ensure a more consistent flow of funds for our program. For example, we are currently working with Kathy Mattea, a native West Virginian and Grammy nominated country singer, who will be supporting our mission with merchandise and public service announcements.

While there are other animal welfare programs supporting spay/neuter, M-SNAP is the only organization in North Central West Virginia that is exclusively dedicated to providing substantive financial support for spay/neuter of cats and dogs, and to educating the public about the benefits of spay/neuter. Our first voucher was mailed in October of 2008, 156 vouchers have been issued to date (February 1, 2009), and we are experiencing a 90% redemption rate. Requests for our vouchers will certainly increase and ultimately reduce the number of unwanted litters and homeless animals in our county, lessening the dependence on euthanasia as a means of control of the animal population. We have made a promising start, and dedicate ourselves to a successful future partnering actively and enthusiastically with our community in carrying out our mission. We will continue to urge all Mon County residents to join in our efforts, fixing our community one pet at a time!