Cat Adoption, Surrender, and Redemption: Fees, Policies, Outcomes

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Outline

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- Fees for cats

Comments and Suggestions
- The need to post the surrendered strays immediately so people can easily hunt for a lost pet.
- Reduced fees for cats (especially kenneling at $33 a day = dog fee).
Cat Adoptions

For cat adoptions, I’ll present ICACS information and CAHS information because CAHS is the facility that has the biggest impact on our adoption outcomes. *When they “cough,” we get a “cold!”*

Standard Fees for ICACS and CAHS

ICAC Fee (standard)
   Under 6 years $82
   Over 6 years $42
   2\textsuperscript{nd} adoption $10

Fees are based on actual costs of neutering/spaying, vaccinations, and microchip. Which seems sensible until we realize that a cat can remain at the shelter for weeks, even months, and the cost of that care adds up. This is one of the major reasons for allowing reduced fees or special event fees.

CAHS Fees (standard)
   Under 5 months $125
   Between 5 mos and 7 years $50
   Over 7 years $25
   2\textsuperscript{nd} adoption is free

*The only area in which ICACS is competitive is for kittens (cats under 5 months)!*
Some Special Event Fees

Some ICACS special event fees

ICACS has Whisker Wednesdays in which they offer free cat and kitten adoptions every Wednesday. The adoption numbers have not been good over the past 3 months, ranging from a rare high of 7 to a low of 1, with common numbers of 3 and 4. Last week was 4, the week before last was 1.

ICACS held a special event, “Cat Craze,” the first Saturday in October, 2014, where adoption fees were $25. Here, 19 cats were adopted – very successful.

In December ICACS had a special event with graduated cat costs depending on time of adoptions: early cost $60, down to $45, then to $15 (after midnight). The $60 fee was for either a dog or a cat, and that’s a great deal on dogs, but not a good deal on cats. The cheap cats were late at night precluding older people (don’t like to drive at night) from taking advantage of the cheaper prices.

Some CAHS special event fees

CAHS has great flexibility in setting fees to match events: $14 cats on Valentine’s Day, half price animals (with Irish last names) near St. Pat’s Day.

Furthermore, in 2 of the last 6 months (October and January), CAHS has offered free cat adoptions, ages over 5 months, kittens under 5 months $25, including everything BUT microchip for October, 2014, and finally including the microchip for January, 2015. The CAHS facility was essentially emptied of cats at the end of January, whereupon CAHS brought in more cats from out of our area (in particular, Bay City).

The effect of shelter hours on adoptions

ICACS hours for adoptions (rule is that adoptions must be started by 30 minutes before closing)
   Tuesday, Wednesday: noon – 6 pm; Thursday, Friday, Saturday: 11 am – 4 pm.

CAHS hours for adoptions (rule is that adoptions must be started by 15 minutes before closing)
   Monday – Saturday: noon – 7 pm

ICACS is never open past 6 pm and is only open 5 days a week rather than 6 days.

Also, if the stopping of adoptions 30 minutes before closing is a necessary policy BUT doesn’t always work in practice because of lines for service.

Nightmare experience – person was in line to adopt with all paperwork done at 5:15, told at 5:45 to go home, no time to get the cat. The cat was to be a valentine’s gift for her daughter. ICACS lost an adoption, but more importantly, made an “enemy” and by association probably made at least 50 friends and family enemies.
COMMENTS AND SUGGESTIONS

ICAC cannot compete with “free,” but we could put our fees more in line with CAHS for adult cats. Our only free day (Wednesday) is not presently successful.

Why can’t our free Wednesday lead to more cat adoptions?
   Publicity – well kept secret.
   Hours – noon to 6 pm, with adoption process having to begin by 5:30. People with 9 to 5 jobs cannot get to ICAC in time to choose a pet, and do the adoption.

Some Suggestions

*Lowering our fees to be more in line with CAHS would help increase adoptions. Again, the defense of this is that an adopted cat is a cat that is not being supported in the shelter (food, litter, etc.), and represents money saved.

*Re-brand ICAC shelter so that paying more is helping with animal rescue and preventing cruelty. Then some price differential could work to ICACS advantage in some cases.

*Extend hours on Whisker Wednesday, or make it Super Saturday so working people can adopt at the shelter.

*Extend or change hours on other days to make the shelter more accessible to working people.

*Set up volunteer adoption counselors who can stay later if necessary. A potential adopter who is line 45 minutes before closing should not be turned away.

*Get rid of Whisker Wednesday in favor of flexibility to have special events with lower adoption fees.

*Work with CAHS on coordinating fees and events, encourage them to take cats from our area, not from out of the area.
Cat Surrender

ICAC fees
Owner surrender fee is $44
Stray surrender fee is $0

Owner surrenders - $44 per cat in a multi-cat household adds up quickly. The fee encourages people to simply dump their cats when they move or are evicted or simply get tired of them. At the very least ICACS should have a discount for multiple cats from a household, and special consideration for low income people (I believe they do have some discretionary power here). Or ICAC could allow one free surrender, then ask for a contribution.

What is a stray? When does a person “own” the cat? This is a very contentious issue and leads to bad feelings and loud arguments between the public and the staff at the shelter. The current “definition” is if a person feeds the cat for a week, then they “own” it. For those of us who have done rescues of lost and abandoned cats, we know that this is not a realistic definition. Lost cats, especially indoor cats, are terrified when they get outside and they do not know how to get home. It can take days, weeks, and sometimes months to build trust by feeding the cat so that the cat can be captured. We had a young tom cat who could come to our door meowing during the coldest part of the year. We started to feed him so we could trap him. He would eat the food, even allow us to pet him, but he would not go into a live trap or a cat carrier. After 2 ½ months of feeding him, sitting beside him, and petting him gently, we were finally able to “trap” him in dog crate. He is now neutered and living the happy indoor life.

I've witnessed people bringing in cats (in sub zero weather) that they found. The cats were hungry, they fed them some food, and when the brought them into the shelter a huge argument ensued about whether they “owned” them or not. The people got really upset, and eventually it was decided that they didn’t “own” them. But the people left angry and with a very bad impression of ICACS, saying they would never come here again.

Another woman brought in a litter of kittens she found (again cold weather), and ICACS tried to charge her $44 per kitten. The woman got mad, announced that she was leaving and dumping the kittens at her first opportunity.
COMMENTS AND SUGGESTIONS

These scenes should not happen, and when someone brings in a stray cat, these scenes are too common.

Feeding a cat is usually done out of worry for the cat's well-being and to facilitate trapping, not to adopt it. Feeding builds trust so that a person can trap the cat and bring it to the shelter. People who do this are taking their time, spending their own money, because they want to save an animal. They want to do the right thing.

Some Suggestions

* Flexibility on surrender fees, possibility allowing one free surrender for owners, certainly tying the fees to income level.

* ICACS needs a realistic definition of stay cat versus owning a cat – something involving more than feeding. Perhaps a vet visit plus feeding plus indoors could work.

The present definition of stray causes very bad feelings about ICACS and alienates potential donors, and as I said before, one angry person translates quickly into 50 angry people, then more. And more often than not, ICACS ends up accepting the cat as a stray anyway.

* Ask for contributions when an animal is surrendered. People bringing in strays care about the animal and will often contribute to its care.
Cat Redemption

There are many issues here and many good ideas out there, including posting new arrivals so people can systematically check to see if their cat has been found. Animals without identification are held for 4 working days, animals with identification for 7 working days, after which the animal becomes the property of ICACS.

Fees

Even the most responsible indoor cat owner can have a cat run outside. Lost cats are often afraid to approach people. It can take weeks or months to trap a cat and bring it into the shelter and by that time, the owner has often given up.

But let’s suppose a cat is at ICACS and is identified by its owner. The owner is then required to pay a redemption fee ($31), sterilization deposit ($78) if the cat requires it, shots ($30), and $33 per day for kenneling. Assuming an owner found their cat in 1 day and is the “perfect” cat owner (i.e. vaccinations up to date, microchip, sterilized). Then that owner would pay a minimum of $31 + $33 = $64 to retrieve the cat.

But in reality, contacting the owner (via microchip) takes time, and the owner getting to the shelter during business hours takes time, and the fee if the cat is picked up in 7 days would be $31 + 7($33) = $262. So for the most responsible owner (pet ID, vaccinations, spay/neuter), the minimum 1 day perfect owner redemption fee would be $64, and the 7 day perfect owner redemption fee would be $262. And we wonder why the redemption rate is so low!

COMMENTS AND SUGGESTIONS

*At the very least, ICACS could change the kenneling fee from $33 (same for cats and dogs) to a more realistic amount for cats, say $10. That would change the previous numbers to $41 and $101.

*At the most, ICACS could waive the redemption fee entirely (for first offense) if the cat is retrieved within 7 days. Remember that un-retrieved cats become costly cats in terms of care.

*The hours can be an issue for people who work because the ICACS public hours are not friendly to those with 9 to 5 jobs.

*Also, ICACS might want to change the last line on the redemption portion of the website: “At the end of the holding period an animal remains unclaimed it becomes county property and may be sold or humanly destroyed.” I don’t think ICACS sells animals anymore, and humanly should be humanely destroyed, but no mention of destruction should be there.