

BE A VOICE

Pet overpopulation is becoming a huge issue in the United States. Through my volunteer experience at our local animal shelter, I see how pets don't have a voice of their own and many owners fail to take responsibility. I interviewed 100 people in my neighborhood about pet over population and owner responsibility. I interviewed our local Animal Control Officer, the President of the Preston County Humane Society and local veterinarian Dr. Frank Cary about spay and neutering programs. I developed a business card to hand out with spay and neuter programs listed. I completed research and made a display board educating people about pet over population and importance of spay/neuter programs. I put this display up at our local store during Spay Day USA the last Tuesday of February yearly. I also presented it to the local humane society. In the display I included a book I have written for primary school children educating them in the problems of pet over population and spay/neuter programs. This book is currently at a publisher. I presented this program at our county and stated 4-H public speaking contests. The speech won 1st place in the state of West Virginia. Finally, I used the display and speech at our county, region and state social studies fairs. The project won 1st place in the state of West Virginia.

My goal with this project was to educate the general public on spay and neuter programs and their importance in controlling pet overpopulation. Through the above listed projects, I have tried to reach as many people as possible. Even if one family takes a stand on spay and neutering and passes it on... I have been successful. This is my presentation.

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The first thing I remember from when I was young...is an empty feeling and not knowing if I had a purpose in life. I did not know my father. He left before I was born. My mother was wonderful but she was alone with 8 of us to raise. I was in a foster home with too many children and never considered one of the family. I was abandoned. Cold, hungry, and alone my life seemed meaningless. Finally... someone cared enough to open their home to me. Now I am adopted and loved. I have a purpose in my life.

Hi my name is Sean and this is the story of Simon, the cat I welcomed into my home and family.

This just one story that has a happy ending. Through volunteering at the local animal shelter, with a veterinarian, and as a member of the humane society I have observed many animals that do not have such a happy ending.

Pet overpopulation is escalating in the United States. If our society continues to ignore this problem... It is going to be out of control in a time that is already in a financial turmoil.

The question I ask you today is ... How can our nation befriend the pet overpopulation during the current economic recession?

I surveyed 100 people. 83% felt there is a pet overpopulation. Imagine for every 1 person born there are 7 cats and dogs born.

In the United States, 71 million households own 231 million pets.

Most of these pets are the lucky ones, they have homes. What about the cats and dogs like Simon that are abandoned or in shelters?

In West Virginia alone, there are 1.8 million people and for every 30 people there is 1 unwanted cat or dog.

West Virginia has 31 counties with animal shelters that take in 102,000 pets each year euthanizing 75%.

Let's look at what this means to our nation. The current world population is 6 billion. It is projected that by mid-century the population will explode to 9 billion. At the current rate that would mean 63 billion cats and dogs. We would employ more humane officers than police officers and have more animals shelters than hospitals.

Consider this statistic...for 1 unaltered female cat and her offspring over a 6 year period 73,041 cats would be produced. For the same 6 year period, 1 unaltered dog and her offspring would produce 67,000. For every 5 of these puppies and kittens, only one remains in their home for their lifetime. That leaves 4 out of 5 to end up abandoned like Simon or free to roam the streets or end up in a shelter.

The humane society of the United States estimates that 6-8 million cats and dogs enter shelters every year. Of these, approximately 3-4 million will be euthanized. That is one animal killed every 6 ½ seconds.

The American Veterinary Medical Associates encourage early spay and neutering of pets as one solution.

Altering your pet is ethical because it decreases the number of pets born, and it is financially sound because it decreases the number of pets entering shelters thus decreasing the cost to taxpayers. Altering your pet is also a great way to promote Public

Health and Safety by decreasing the surplus of pets thus controlling drop offs, traffic hazards, barking complaints, and dog fights and bites.

Currently there are 21 states with mandatory spay/neuter laws including West Virginia. With the new laws, it is estimated that population in shelters will decrease by 50% over a 10 year period.

On average it costs \$50 a day for the shelter to house a homeless animal. Annually it costs West Virginia taxpayers \$3 million a year and nationally \$2 billion.

Possibly in part due to a decline in economy, abandoned pets are up 71% since 2007. The average cost for owning a dog is \$1400 a year and \$1000 for a cat.

Overall, Americans spend \$16.9 billion on pet food annually. Pet food prices have increased a record 26% since 2007. This is no surprise since the main ingredient is corn. Ethanol fuel needs are increasing and farms are decreasing. This, with the cost of gas and transportation, has pet food prices skyrocketing.

Our economic situation looks grim with 12.5 million jobless people and a raising consumer price index. The price we pay for goods and services is 29% higher than it was 10 years ago.

Conversely, for the same 10 year period, for every 1 dollar we invest in a spay/neuter clinic, tax payers would save \$18.72.

As a nation we have to invest ourselves wisely including our time, our money, and ourselves. We have to be proactive problem solvers in our own community. One person can make a difference.

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In conclusion, be a voice for those who do not have one. Be a **V**olunteer for your local animal shelter. Be an **O**wner of a homeless or abandoned pet from the shelter. Be an **I**nvestor in your local shelter and donate money or supplies. Be a **C**onscientious pet owner and alter your animals. Be an **E**ducator and raise public awareness of pet overpopulation. And finally, be a **V**OICE. Simon thanks you, I thank you, and your world thanks you.

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