

## Becoming an Outdoor Cat Advocate

**Becky Robinson, CatChannel expert on feral and stray cats, provides a look into her life as a cat advocate.**

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Q: Becky, how did you become involved in helping outdoor cats?

A: I grew up in a family that always helped cats, dogs and wildlife. I can remember helping turtles, snakes, rabbits, squirrels, foxes and of course dozens of dogs and cats. Some of my earliest memories are helping untangle chained dogs and giving food and water to the often-neglected small animals at five and dime stores. In 1975, my aunt formed the first humane society in my hometown of McPherson, Kansas.

I started my career as a social worker but soon found my passion was advocating for animals. I moved to Washington, D.C., in 1988 to work for animal protection on a national level.

One day, I discovered a colony of feral cats living in an alley. I soon realized there was no help available for these animals. Neither shelters nor individuals will adopt unsocialized cats. Instead, they are trapped and removed as local governments continue to rely on archaic practices of catch-and-kill. Those cats in that alley needed me, and I knew I had to help them!

A practice being used in Denmark and the United Kingdom called trap-neuter-return, a comprehensive, non-lethal approach to feral cat population control, was not known in our country. In trap-neuter-return, healthy feral cats are sterilized, vaccinated and then returned to their habitat under the care of volunteers. Adoptable (tame) cats and kittens are placed into homes.

And so I rolled up my sleeves and with the help of a few friends, we started to humanely trap the 54 cats and kittens in that alley and transport them to a local veterinarian where they were spayed or neutered and vaccinated.

Alley Cat Allies started as a small group of volunteers working out of my house sharing information with others about feral cats and trap-neuter-return. We soon started to get calls from around the country. Most were from people who were feeding cats in their neighborhoods. We didn't advertise, and there was no e-mail or website for our organization in the early 1990s, but people were finding us. It became crystal clear to me that there was an enormous need for information about trap-neuter-return on a national level.

In 1991, Alley Cat Allies was incorporated with a strong mission and vision to go forth and educate caregivers and convince public officials to embrace spay and neuter for feral and outdoor cats in place of catch-and-kill. Over the past two decades, tens of thousands of people have trapped the cats they feed and have seen that they are spayed or neutered and vaccinated. When I travel to other communities, I often see eartipped cats, and I'm so delighted.

But, it is a fact that today our shelters are killing more than 70 percent of all cats who enter their doors. A new goal at Alley Cat Allies is to create an animal shelter system in our nation that won't fail the cats and will provide them true protection. Join me please. If you have not signed up for our national advocacy campaign, visit the Alley Cat Allies website.