



YES, YOU CAN TRAIN A CAT!

A study exploring the feasibility of clicker training shelter cats




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CAT STATS


- ▶ In US households: 77.8 million dogs, 85.8 million cats (APPA 2015-16)
- ▶ Banfield Pet Hospitals (>900 in US) – one cat seen for every 5 dogs (2015)
- ▶ 56% cat owners vs 68% dog owners consider their pets family members (APPA 2015-16)
- ▶ 23% more cats vs dogs taken into shelters (SAWA 2011)
- ▶ 4/10 shelter cats leave alive vs 7/10 shelter dogs (SAWA 2011); 70% cats euthanized in shelters (HSUS)
- ▶ 2% cats RTO vs 20% dogs (SAWA 2011)



playbuzz.com

STRESS & ITS EFFECTS ON SHELTER CATS

- ▶ Behavior problems
 - ▶ Hiding
 - ▶ Aggression
- ▶ Physical problems
 - ▶ URIs
 - ▶ GI problems
 - ▶ Decreased elimination






- ▶ Can decrease stress and abnormal/unwanted behaviors
- ▶ Help cats be more social and approachable
- ▶ Clicker training is one component of enrichment
 - ▶ Positive interaction with people
 - ▶ Teach useful and/or fun behaviors
 - ▶ Training of shelter dogs may decrease stress, increase chances of adoption, ease transition to a home (Thorne et al, 2006)


ENRICHMENT



CLICK
Clicker Learning Institute for Cats and Kittens
 An innovative non-profit program to increase shelter cat adoptions and elevate the status of cats in our communities, our shelters, our homes and our hearts.



Fletcher



- ▶ Established 2015
- ▶ Use clicker training primarily
- ▶ Separate but associated with local cat rescue
- ▶ Unlike any other?



AN INNOVATIVE NON-PROFIT PROGRAM...



- ▶ Up to 10 cats from FCCRSNC, 2 weeks
- ▶ 2 behavior cases, others randomly chosen



Britley

...TO INCREASE SHELTER CAT ADOPTIONS...



- ▶ Online video tutorials (ClickYourCat.org)
- ▶ Clicker training classes
- ▶ Outreach



Tessa

...AND ELEVATE THE STATUS OF CATS IN OUR COMMUNITIES, OUR SHELTERS, OUR HOMES AND OUR HEARTS.



- ▶ Positive reinforcement, marker training
- ▶ Marine mammals, zoo, fish, people
- ▶ The click
 - ▶ Event marker
 - ▶ Bridge
 - ▶ Secondary (conditioned) reinforcer
 - ▶ Distinct and consistent sound
 - ▶ Precise



WHAT IS CLICKER TRAINING?

- ▶ To assess the ability of cats housed in a shelter-like setting to learn specific new behaviors in a limited period of time through the use of clicker training.



RESEARCH GOAL

- ▶ Aug 2016 – April 2017
- ▶ Cats housed at our facility
- ▶ Randomly selected from: ≥ 6 mos, no restricted diets, adoptable
- ▶ Admitted Fridays, acclimate over weekend
- ▶ Trained 2x/day* (approx. 11am/4pm), 5 min each, Mon-Thur x 2 weeks (75 min total) *first Monday trained only once



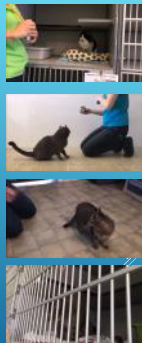
METHODS

- ▶ Written training protocols
- ▶ Same two trainers
- ▶ Reinforcer = tuna or baby food (if needed, other treats)
- ▶ Played with/petted at least 10 min/day
- ▶ Daily out-of-cage time
- ▶ Pre- and post-assessments



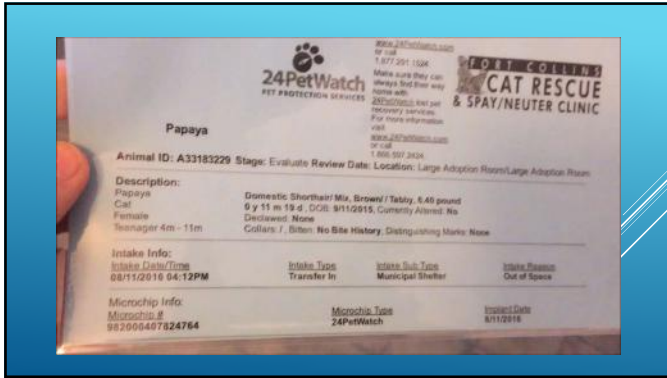
METHODS

- ▶ Target – touch nose to target stick or demonstrate purposeful movement toward and come close to touching stick
- ▶ Spin – complete an approximately 360 degree turn in either direction
- ▶ Sit – butt on floor with front paws on floor
- ▶ High-five – touch front paw to human palm or fingers held at level of cat's head



BEHAVIORS ASSESSED





Behavior 0 = no cued behavior offered	Precision				
	Trial 1	Trial 2	Trial 3	Trial 4	Trial 5
Target (verbal + stick or finger) 1=stretching neck towards target 2=purposeful movement, no touch OR touches w/face 3=actual contact w/nose					
Sit (verbal + stick or hand cue) 1=come crouch 2=butt on floor or close and/or front paws go up 3=sit with front paws on ground and butt contacts floor					
Spin (verbal + stick or finger) 1 = head follows or < 90° 2 = spins 90° - 270° 3 = spins 270° - 360°					
High-5 (verbal + hand +/- stick) 1=any front paw lift (one or both) 2=movement towards hand with just one paw 3=purposeful hand contact w/paw					

- ▶ 100 cats assessed that had paired pre- and post-assessments completed
 - ▶ Removed from study if adopted early, went to isolation, had surgery (inadvertent), etc.
- ▶ 57 (57%) females
- ▶ 43 (43%) males
- ▶ Age: mean = 3.55 years, youngest=6 months, oldest=12 years.

RESULTS

**Comparison of pre- and post-assessment scores
for four taught behaviors in 100 cats***

	Pre-assessment scores				Post-assessment scores			
	0	1	2	3	0	1	2	3
Targeting	30 30%	3 3%	19 19%	48 48%	2 2%	3 3%	16 16%	79 79%
Spin	24 27%	18 20.2%	24 27.0%	23 25.8%	12 12%	12 12%	16 16%	60 60%
Sit	34 46.6%	12 16.4%	20 27.4%	7 9.6%	31 31%	10 10%	32 32%	27 27%
High-five	85 98.8	1 1.2%	--	--	51 51%	11 11%	7 7%	31 31%

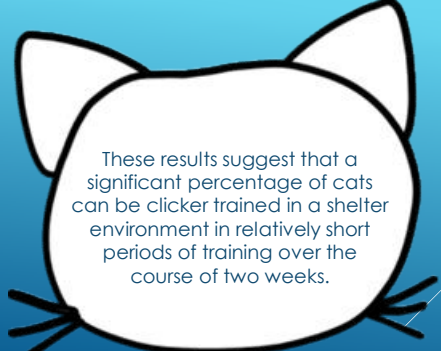
*Some cats were not asked to perform all behaviors in the pre-assessment if they were too frightened or based on their position in the cage or room.

► Many cats demonstrated the ability to perform desired behaviors in the post-assessment:

- 79% of cats scored a 3 for target training indicating fluent ability; another 16% scored 2
- 60% scored 3 for spinning; 16% scored 2
- 27% scored 3 for sitting; 32% scored 2
- 31% scored 3 for high-fives; 7% scored 2



RESULTS SUMMARY



These results suggest that a significant percentage of cats can be clicker trained in a shelter environment in relatively short periods of training over the course of two weeks.



▶ Training adopter-desired behaviors

- ▶ Focus on 4 behaviors that we attempt to teach all cats:
 - ▶ Tolerate being held
 - ▶ Rub on hand/cage door
 - ▶ Come to front of cage
 - ▶ Play
- ▶ Can we train these?
- ▶ Does it shorten length of stay?

WHAT'S NEXT?

▶ Additional goals:

- ▶ Help other shelters implement cat clicker training programs
- ▶ Share training protocols
- ▶ Help make clicker training pet cats commonplace



WHAT'S NEXT?

- ▶ Email Cheryl Kolus for training manual (ClickYourCatInfo@gmail.com)
- ▶ Decide on method for choosing cats to train (shy, long-term, hard-to-adopt or all of them?)
- ▶ Decide on staff member who will be in charge
- ▶ Recruit dedicated volunteers to be trained by staff member

IMPLEMENT IN YOUR SHELTER!

- ▶ Determine how to keep track of training per cat (cage cards and/or training logs – I'll share!)
- ▶ Determine priority behaviors (come to front [target to finger], high-five, etc.)
- ▶ Just 5 min/day a few days/week per cat!
- ▶ Use regular food for many of them!




IMPLEMENT IN YOUR SHELTER!



FEARFUL CATS

Photos from *What Is My Cat Saying?*
By Carol Byrnes and Jacqueline Munera


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STRESS & ITS EFFECTS ON SHELTER CATS



- ▶ Food offered
- ▶ Petting
- ▶ Clicker training
 - ▶ If eating, tongue click to load clicker then simple target to finger or stick
 - ▶ Or c/t signs of relaxation
- ▶ Play
- ▶ Other cats?
- ▶ Petting stick
- ▶ TIME!
- ▶ Working home?



OUR APPROACH

- ▶ Quiet
- ▶ Predictable
- ▶ Same caregivers
- ▶ One-on-one interactions
- ▶ Time



Kipling

MOST IMPORTANT FACTORS TO ALLAY FEARS

- ▶ Any unused/rarely used room?
- ▶ Office foster
- ▶ Schedules
- ▶ Specific volunteers (Fearful Cat Team)
- ▶ Hiding places
- ▶ Choices
- ▶ Enrichment

Quiet
Predictable
Same caregivers
One-on-one interactions
Time

ALTERNATIVES IN SHELTER

- ▶ TIME
- ▶ Hiding places
- ▶ Choices
- ▶ Play?
- ▶ Other animals?
- ▶ Meds/supplements/diet?

Quiet
Predictable
Same caregivers
One-on-one interactions
Time



FEARFUL CATS IN FOSTER HOMES

- ▶ F2F – Angela Rentfro, DVD
- ▶ Systematic method of using negative reinforcement to encourage friendly behaviors
- ▶ FearfulToFriendly.com; YouTube
- ▶ Animal Sheltering Magazine Nov/Dec 2010

FEARFUL TO FRIENDLY



Animal Sheltering Magazine Nov/Dec 2010

- ▶ Slater, et al. 2013
 - ▶ Journal: Animals (open access)
 - ▶ ASPCApro.org Webinar: Is That Cat Feral?

FERAL OR FEARFUL? (LESS OR MORE SOCIALIZED?)

- ▶ More Socialized (**any one** of these):
 - ▶ Chirp
 - ▶ Rub
 - ▶ Knead
 - ▶ Touch
 - ▶ Play
 - ▶ Front of cage during assessment
 - ▶ Tail up position

FERAL OR FEARFUL? (LESS OR MORE SOCIALIZED?)

▶ More Socialized (**four or more** of these):

- ▶ Sniff
- ▶ Roll
- ▶ Reach
- ▶ Approach front of cage
- ▶ Yawn
- ▶ Groom
- ▶ Standing or moving at end of assessment

FERAL OR FEARFUL?
(LESS OR MORE SOCIALIZED?)

▶ Other key points

- ▶ Assessed 5 times over 3 days
- ▶ Interaction with assessor was important for change in behavior to occur
- ▶ 3 days to adjust is helpful

FERAL OR FEARFUL?
(LESS OR MORE SOCIALIZED?)



Shy Karen's Continued Transformation
See her first video at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=!!AqFEELytp>

- ▶ David Lerner – Founder, CLICK
- ▶ Lori Kogan, PhD – Colorado State University
- ▶ Jill Kinsey
- ▶ Julia Pinckney and Madison Tolan



Lava

Shelly Roberts

Shay

Manchego

Thistle

Tribby

ClickYourCat.org

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