



# INCREASING RETURNS TO OWNERS

**Do you have animals coming in to your pound/ shelter that have been found wandering and are never reclaimed? These animals, often make up the majority of our intake and are expensive to collect and care for. So, what can we do to improve the situation?**

*This resource is accompanied by a checklist poster for you to print off and feature on a wall. It can be used as part of your strategic plan to improve reclaim rates in your community.*



## **1 Empower the community to get both lost and found pets home.**

Do the community know how to look for their lost pet, or how to get a found pet home? Do they know where to go and who to ask for help? Building knowledge in the community will ensure that people are reunited with their pets as quickly as possible.

**Do** - Promote effective strategies to help people find their lost pet or finders to return a lost pet to its owner. These need to be specific to species, personality and indoor/outdoor status. You can find lost and found pet brochures free to use at <https://www.g2z.org.au/lost-pets.html>.

**Do** - Have lost and found pet information on your website, in vet clinics, pet supply stores, and pounds and shelters so people are prepared, and aware of how to help others.

**Do** - Promote these resources at every opportunity i.e. newsletters, on-hold messages, social media.

**Do** - Provide links to resources such as pet finding support services and websites for example:

- [www.missionreunite.org](http://www.missionreunite.org)
- [www.missinganimalresponse.com](http://www.missinganimalresponse.com).

You can find lost and found pet brochures free to use at [www.g2z.org.au/lost-pets](http://www.g2z.org.au/lost-pets)



## **2 Get the pet home if possible rather than impound.**

**This is especially important for cats as they have been found to be 13 times more likely to return home if NOT brought into a shelter.**

**Do** - Scan the pet for a microchip in the field where you find it to reunite it with its owner without it needing to go to the shelter if at all possible.

**Do** - Door-knock in a 5-house radius (for cats and further afield for dogs)

**Do** - Give staff (and finders) resources and guidance on how to get the pet home in the field as opposed to bringing it into the facility.

**3 X marks the spot - Put up posters where the pet is found to increase the chances of the owner finding their pet quickly.**

**Do** - Print the FOUND CAT Council template at <https://www.g2z.org.au/lost-pets.html> with fields for species, colour, identifying features and the location and phone number to find the pet. Fill it in on the spot with a thick black texta and protect in a plastic pocket. Attach it securely to a post or wall close to the spot the pet was found. Add an instant photo if possible too!



**4 A picture tells a thousand words - Posting photos of the lost pets in your care on your website and social media is essential.**

**Do** - Use a good quality, in focus, well-lit photo of every lost pet in your care. Since most are cross-breeds, photos are the best way for an owner to identify their pet. They can check remotely for quicker reclaim too.

**Do** - Post the photos and description of the pet immediately upon intake.

**Don't** - Just rely on social media. Unfortunately, just utilising social media is not sufficient, due to the policy changes made at Facebook regarding what they will show to your likers, of your posts. Also, not everyone is social media savvy, but hopefully everyone will be able to find your municipal or organisation web page.



**5 Accessibility - Location and opening hours matter. Ensure that all of the community can access your facility.**

**Do** - Locate the pound/shelter in an area that is well sign-posted and accessible by public transport.

**Do** - Be open (and publicise it) around regular work hours e.g. 7 - 10 a.m. and/or 4 - 7 p.m. weekdays, and at least 4 hours on weekend days. This will mean quicker reclaim, and more community support for Council. Having to take time off work to reclaim a pet may not be achievable for many owners and may result in delayed reclaim. Longer length of stay results in increased costs to Council and owner, space issues and decreased welfare for the pet.

**Do** - Welcome people with a smile to a clean and bright facility with staff and volunteers trained to help.

**Do** - Remember we are delivering a community service and all that entails from a customer service perspective.

**6 Money talks - Review your fee and fine structure for reclaiming pets.**

Council bears the cost if the pet is not reclaimed. It can be false economy to keep a pet in your care. Working with an owner to solve the cause of the wandering creates long-lasting change and fewer nuisance issues and impounds.

**Do** - Consider "First ride home free" style initiatives so that owners can see the benefits delivered by your department.

**Don't** - Treat the fee as a punishment for the owner - often just losing their pet is punishment enough.

**Do** - Waive fees and provide incentives for owners of first time wandering dogs and cats to fix the cause e.g. low cost/free desexing and microchipping.



**7 Provide support -Some pet owners may be reluctant to reclaim their pet if they are having problems containing it or experiencing other issues in the home.**

Support and assistance provided by the professionals (that's you!) may be all that is needed to keep the pet-owner bond intact.

**Do** - Focus on getting the pet home and find the reason for escape/wandering to help prevent the problem.

**Do** - Take the time to talk to the owner to see if there are management issues at home that they might need assistance with. Providing the information and follow-up support to help them put a plan in place may make the difference between another pet in your facility and the pet staying in its own home.

**Do** - Refer the pet owner to other professionals if needed i.e. veterinarians, trainers, behaviourists, community support workers, handymen, fencers.



**8 Train your team - Having team members that are skilled in processing found pets can make all the difference for quick reunification.**

**Do** - Train staff on how to scan for a microchip including multiple scans, using multiple scanners and scanning in the field. If the pet is fractious it may be necessary to sedate it before scanning. You just never know who has a microchip until you look carefully.

**Do** - Train staff (and volunteers) to become detectives when pet identification can't be found e.g. searching local social media pages, sending letters to last known address, posting found pet notices where the pet was found can all make the difference.

**Do** - Implement comprehensive processes and policies for lost and found listings and advice provided to owners so that the most accurate information is recorded and shared effectively on a consistent basis.



**9** **No-one leaves naked - Microchips and external ID tags greatly increase the chances of a lost pet being found.**

**Do** - Provide and fit all reclaimed (and adopted) pets with a collar and ID tag. Research suggests that ID tagging is an effective method to potentially decrease stray intake into shelters and return pets home.

**Do** - Have an engraving machine onsite.

**Do** - Provide free or subsidised microchipping services to all reclaimed (and adopted) pets. It is recommended that these services are offered several times a year in various locations in your municipality to access many more pet owners in the community.

**Do** - Provide Real Estate agents with microchip “Change of Address” forms to put in their packs that go to new renters.

**Do** - Educate owners to keep handy the name of the registry their pet is microchipped with at time of reclaim or adoption. This can be a step that is missed by the owner due to unfamiliarity with the process.



**10** **Council registration - Increasing the number of registered pets in the community can serve many purposes, as well as providing another means of pet identification.**

Registration fees can also enable the department to offer extra support services to pet owners in the community. Having a database of pet owners in the community can help with developing strategies and communications for emergencies, disease and other pet related topics.

**Do** - Raise community awareness of the additional benefits of pet registration e.g. quicker return and more likely to be returned home if lost.

**Do** - Make it easy for pet owners to register their pets by partnering with vet clinics, pet supply stores and other businesses, and enabling them to process registrations as well as providing online and phone payment options.

**Do** - Provide free first-time registration and amnesty periods.

**Do** - Provide support and assistance to help pet owners comply with registration requirements.

**11** **Keep your pound/shelter in your community.**

The move to the development and use of “super pounds” (facilities that service a number of municipalities resulting in larger numbers of admissions and often located in areas further from where the pet was found) has resulted in reduced reclaim rates.

This can be due to confusion by the public on where to find their pet, staff being less familiar with the details of the pets in their care as there are more of them, lack of accessibility to the facility if further from where the owner is located, etc.

**Do** - Wherever possible keep your facility in the community it services.

**Do** - Transfer those animals brought to you by finders from another municipality, back to the appropriate shelter or pound for that area. If that is not possible then ensure the pet is listed as found with the vets, Council, local social media pages and shelters of the originating community.



**12** **Measure what matters - It is essential for future planning, best use of resources and community education to keep comprehensive data on the animals that come into your care.**

**Do** - Keep records:

- Who (each animal’s species, sex, age, physical description, if desexed, any ID and microchip number, impound number and previous impound number etc.).
- How (how did the pet come into care, who brought it in, their contact details, interest in adoption if not claimed, staff initials, date/time)
- Where (the exact address it was found)
- What happened (outcome, strategies used to find the owner, was it claimed, how the owner found where the pet was, how did it get out).

**Do** - Analyse the data. Which strategies are more successful i.e. lead to return to owner, reduce impound time, prevent repeat behaviour, cost effective

**Do** - Keep a simple Excel spreadsheet or Google spreadsheet which is easy to use and accessible by multiple staff/workstations

**ONCE YOU HAVE THESE STRATEGIES IN PLACE, REGISTER YOUR COMMUNITY WITH G2Z AND SHARE YOUR SUCCESS!**



**GETTING 2 ZERO**

## APPENDIX: RESOURCES

### Educate the community

[www.missionreunite.org](http://www.missionreunite.org)  
[www.missinganimalresponse.com](http://www.missinganimalresponse.com)  
[www.g2z.org.au/lost-pets](http://www.g2z.org.au/lost-pets)

### Identification photos and social media

[www.aspcapro.org/blog/2016/11/03/hit-em-your-best-shot-taking-great-photos-shelter-animals-part-5](http://www.aspcapro.org/blog/2016/11/03/hit-em-your-best-shot-taking-great-photos-shelter-animals-part-5)  
[www.aspcapro.org/blog/2016/08/17/hit-em-your-best-shot-taking-great-photos-shelter-animals-part-3](http://www.aspcapro.org/blog/2016/08/17/hit-em-your-best-shot-taking-great-photos-shelter-animals-part-3)  
[www.chewonthis.maddiesfund.org/2017/11/facebook-zero/](http://www.chewonthis.maddiesfund.org/2017/11/facebook-zero/)  
[www.heartsspeak.org/project/shelter-photography-basics-part-3-getting-great-photos-anywhere/](http://www.heartsspeak.org/project/shelter-photography-basics-part-3-getting-great-photos-anywhere/)  
[www.heartsspeak.org/project/guide-to-taking-great-cell-phone-photos/](http://www.heartsspeak.org/project/guide-to-taking-great-cell-phone-photos/)  
[www.heartsspeak.org/project/shelter-photography-basics-part-2-team/](http://www.heartsspeak.org/project/shelter-photography-basics-part-2-team/)

### Fees and Support

[www.aspcapro.org/blog/2016/02/17/mending-hearts](http://www.aspcapro.org/blog/2016/02/17/mending-hearts) <https://www.sheltermedicine.com/library/resources/?utf8=%E2%9C%93&search%5Bslug%5D=cat-and-dog-reclaim-cost-comparison-calculator>  
[www.facebook.com/camdencommunitysupport/posts/801597226680650](https://www.facebook.com/camdencommunitysupport/posts/801597226680650)

### Staff Training

[www.aspcapro.org/blog/2017/05/01/could-your-lost-and-found-listings-use-tune](http://www.aspcapro.org/blog/2017/05/01/could-your-lost-and-found-listings-use-tune) <http://bit.ly/2Edu1oV>  
<http://bit.ly/2ExUwZM> [http://sheltermedicine.vetmed.ufl.edu/files/2011/10/Microchip\\_scanning\\_Diagram.pdf](http://sheltermedicine.vetmed.ufl.edu/files/2011/10/Microchip_scanning_Diagram.pdf)

### Identification

[www.speedytag.com.au](http://www.speedytag.com.au)  
[www.aspcapro.org/blog/2016/05/18/id-them...-and-meet-your-goal](http://www.aspcapro.org/blog/2016/05/18/id-them...-and-meet-your-goal)  
[www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0167587711001565](http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0167587711001565)

### Registration

[www.nationalcanineresearchcouncil.com/sites/default/files/The-Responsible-Pet-Ownership-Model-2016.pdf](http://www.nationalcanineresearchcouncil.com/sites/default/files/The-Responsible-Pet-Ownership-Model-2016.pdf)  
National Animal Care and Control Association Guidelines - Animal Identification - Dog Licenses

### Best Practice Examples and General Information

[www.aspcapro.org/resource/saving-lives-return-owner/strategies-boost-your-rto-rates](http://www.aspcapro.org/resource/saving-lives-return-owner/strategies-boost-your-rto-rates)  
[https://c.ymcdn.com/sites/nacanet.site-ym.com/resource/resmgr/Docs/NACA\\_Guidelines.pdf](https://c.ymcdn.com/sites/nacanet.site-ym.com/resource/resmgr/Docs/NACA_Guidelines.pdf)  
[www.animalsheltering.org/sites/default/files/Rethinking-RTOs-Wasson-Brigid-1.pdf](http://www.animalsheltering.org/sites/default/files/Rethinking-RTOs-Wasson-Brigid-1.pdf)  
[www.g2z.org.au/7th-national-g2z-summit-2017.html](http://www.g2z.org.au/7th-national-g2z-summit-2017.html)

