YES, YOU **CAN** TRAIN A CAT!

A pilot study exploring the implementation of a clicker training program for shelter cats.

- 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)
- 68% 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)

CAT STATS

- Behavior problems
  - Hissing
  - Aggression
- Physical problems
  - URI
  - GI problems
  - Decreased elimination

STRESS & ITS EFFECTS ON SHELTER CATS
ENRICHMENT

- 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 adorable behaviors
- Training of shelter dogs decreased stress, increased chances of adoption, eased transition to a home (Thorne et al., 2006)

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.
AN INNOVATIVE NON-PROFIT PROGRAM...

- Estab. 2015
- Use clicker training primarily
- Separate but assoc. with local cat rescue
- Unlike any other?

...TO INCREASE SHELTER CAT ADOPTIONS...

- Up to 12 cats from FCCRNC, 2 weeks
- 2 behavior cases, others randomly chosen

...AND ELEVATE THE STATUS OF CATS IN OUR COMMUNITIES, OUR SHELTERS, OUR HOMES AND OUR HEARTS.
WHAT IS CLICKER TRAINING?

- Positive reinforcement, marker training
- Marine mammals, zoo, fish, people
- The click
  - Event marker
  - Bridge
  - Secondary (conditioned) reinforcer
  - Distinct and the same every time

RESEARCH GOAL

- To assess the implementation of a clicker training program for cats in a limited admissions cat shelter.

METHODS

- Jan-March 2016
- 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 (80 min total)
METHODS

- Written training protocols
- Same two trainers
- Reinforcer = canned food, kibble (if needed, other treats)
- Played with/petted 10 min/day
- Daily out-of-cage time

BEHAVIORS ASSESSED

- Target – touch nose to target stick or demonstrate purposeful movement toward and come close to touching stick
- High-five – touch front paw to human palm or fingers held at level of cat’s head
- Spin – complete a 360 degree turn in either direction

BEHAVIORS ASSESSED

- Sit – butt on floor with front paws on floor, too
- Shake hands – touch paw to human palm or fingers held approx. 2 inches from floor
- Beg – both front paws up, spine close to vertical, back paws remain on the floor
BEHAVIORS ASSESSED

- Go into carrier - all four feet inside carrier
- Go to mat - all four paws on mat
- Other

RESULTS

- 43 cats assessed
  - Removed from study if adopted early, went to iso, had surgery (inadvertent), etc.
  - 19 (44.2%) male
  - 24 (55.8%) female
  - Age: mean = 3.38 years, (SD 2.44), min 6 months, max 9 years
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Behavior</th>
<th>Proficiency Target stick</th>
<th>Cage or not</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Just started learning this behavior; has a long way to go before fluency</td>
<td>Able to ask for and get this behavior, even if not fluent, about 80% of the time or more</td>
<td>Able to ask for and get this behavior, even if not fluent, about 80% of the time or more</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Targeting (n=43)</td>
<td>3 (7.1)</td>
<td>2 (4.8)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High-five (n=27)</td>
<td>4 (15.4)</td>
<td>7 (26.9)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spin (n=35)</td>
<td>5 (14.7)</td>
<td>9 (26.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sit (n=24)</td>
<td>2 (8.3)</td>
<td>3 (12.5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shake hands (n=9)</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>2 (22.2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;beg&quot; (n=14)</td>
<td>3 (21.4)</td>
<td>8 (57.1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enter carrier (n=4)</td>
<td>1 (25.0)</td>
<td>3 (75.0)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Go to mat (n=12)</td>
<td>5 (41.7)</td>
<td>2 (16.7)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Many cats demonstrated the ability to perform desired behaviors:
- 88.4% of cats scored a 4 for target training indicating fluent ability (n=43)
- 40.7% scored 4 for high-five and another 15.4% scored 3 (n=27)
- 28.6% scored 4 for spinning; 32.4% scored 3 (n=35)
- 20.8% scored 4 for sitting; 13% scored 3 (n=24)
- 66.7% scored 4 for shaking hands (n=9)

4 = Able to ask for and get a fluent behavior about 80% of the time or more
3 = Able to ask for and get the behavior, even if not fluent, about 80% of the time

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.
WHAT'S NEXT?

- Fine-tuning this study:
  - Focus on 4 behaviors that we attempt to teach all cats:
    - Target
    - Sit
    - Spin
    - High-five
  - More rigorous assessments (videotaped and scored at beginning and end of 2-week period by two reviewers for interrater reliability)
  - Use potentially higher value food rewards

WHAT'S NEXT?

- Potential future studies:
  - Do clicker trained shelter cats have a shorter length of stay?
  - Does clicker training factor in to why adopters chose that cat?
  - Do owners continue clicker training their adopted cat at home?
  - Does clicker training impact the cat-owner bond?
  - Can clicker training make veterinary visits less stressful?
WHAT'S NEXT?

- Additional goals:
  - Help other shelters implement cat clicker training programs
  - Share training protocols
  - Help make clicker training pet cats commonplace

IMPLEMENT IN YOUR SHELTER!

- Email Cheryl Kolus for training manual (info@clickyourcat.org)
- 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!
David Lerner – Founder, CLICK
Lori Kogan, PhD – Colorado State University
Jennie Willis, PhD – Colorado State University
Amelia Weber – BA, CPDT-KA
Julia Pinckney – BA

Thank You!

Lava
Shelly
Manchego
Thistle
Tilly

ClickYourCat.org

The End!