

YES, YOU CAN TRAIN A CAT!

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



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- ▶ 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)

CAT STATS



playbuzz.com

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



STRESS & ITS EFFECTS ON SHELTER CATS




- ▶ 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, incr chances of adoption, eased 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




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

AN INNOVATIVE NON-PROFIT PROGRAM...





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

...TO INCREASE SHELTER CAT ADOPTIONS...




Desdemona



- ▶ Online video tutorials
- ▶ Clicker training classes
- ▶ Outreach
- ▶ Kitten kindergarten (future plan)

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



Tessa





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




WHAT IS CLICKER TRAINING?

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



RESEARCH GOAL

- ▶ 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)



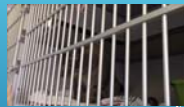
METHODS

- ▶ 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



METHODS

- ▶ 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

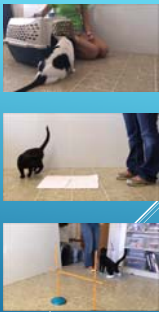
- ▶ Sit – butt on floor with front paws on floor, too
- ▶ Shake hands – touch paw to human palm or fingers held approx. 2 inches from floor
- ▶ Beg – both front paws up, spine close to vertical, back paws remain on the floor

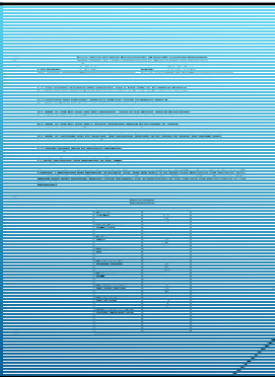


BEHAVIORS ASSESSED

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

BEHAVIORS ASSESSED





- ▶ 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 is 9 years.

RESULTS

Behavior	Proficiency				Target stick		Cage or not	
	Just started teaching this behavior; has a long way to go before fluency	Learning the behavior well, but still has some problems with it	Able to ask for and get the behavior, even if not fluent, about 8/10	Able to ask for and get a fluent behavior about 8/10 times or more	does not need target stick for this behavior	needs target stick for this behavior	performs behavior outside of cage	only performs behavior in cage
Targeting (n = 43)	--	3 (7.1)	2 (4.8)	37 (88.1)	34 (81.0)	8 (19.0)	41 (97.6)	1 (2.4)
"high - five" (n=27)	4 (15.4)	7 (26.9)	4 (15.4)	11 (42.3)	21 (80.8)	5 (19.2)	22 (84.6)	4 (15.4)
Spin (n=35)	5 (14.7)	9 (26.5)	11 (32.4)	9 (26.5)	29 (85.3)	5 (14.7)	33 (97.1)	1 (2.9)
Sit (n=24)	2 (8.7)	13 (56.5)	3 (13.0)	5 (21.7)	17 (73.9)	6 (26.1)	--	--
Shake hands (n=9)	--	2 (22.2)	1 (11.1)	6 (66.7)	--	--	6 (66.7)	3 (33.3)
"beg" (n = 14)	3 (21.4)	8 (57.1)	2 (14.3)	1 (7.1)	12 (85.7)	2 (14.3)	--	--
Enter carrier (n=4)	1 (25.0)	3 (75.0)	--	--	--	--	--	--
Go to mat (n=12)	5 (41.7)	3 (25.0)	4 (33.3)	--	--	--	--	--

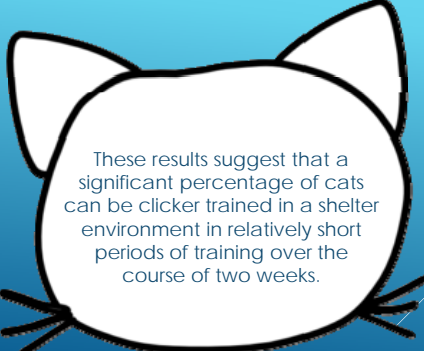
► Many cats demonstrated the ability to perform desired behaviors:

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



▶ 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



WHAT'S NEXT?

- ▶ 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!

IMPLEMENT IN YOUR SHELTER!

- ▶ David Lerner – Founder, CLICK
- ▶ Lori Kogan, PhD – Colorado State University
- ▶ Jennie Willis, PhD – Colorado State University
- ▶ Amelia Wieber – BA, CPDT-KA
- ▶ Julia Pinckney - BA



Lava





Shelly Roberts

Shay





Manchego



Thistle

Trilby



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