How partnering with a local NGO can lead to more sustainable and long term animal welfare in a fast growing and multicultural community in Mexico.

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The International Fund for Animal Welfare (IFAW) leads projects that seek to empower local communities to address animal welfare and human conflicts associated with roaming dogs and cats. Changes in knowledge, attitudes and availability of resources are necessary to bring about the changes in human behavior that may carry a community to a tipping point of collective responsibility. In Playa del Carmen, Mexico, one of the fastest growing cities in the world, we have been working with a local animal welfare organization, Coco’s Animal Rescue, to reach community members and improve access to veterinary resources for the population of this tourism-driven economy.

Our local partner Coco’s Animal Welfare, offers low cost and free spay and neuter services for any community member, including many local animal shelters, as well as a program which offers free and low cost services for any recently rescued and/or adopted cat or dog.

This program seeks to enable community members to actively engage and care for animals found in distress, by offering support in rehoming, sterilization, vaccination and basic preventive care. With this, we upgrade animal welfare standards and engender changing behaviors towards roaming animals in need.

Many community members want to help dogs and cats in need but are aware of the expense and responsibility this involves. If help is offered but the responsibility remains with the community member, they can actively engage, comply with veterinary standards of care and even care for the individual animal until a permanent home is found.

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CONCLUSION

These community based programs have been improving the community’s attitudes, perceptions and behaviors toward dogs and cats through encouraging and engaging people to help a roaming dog or cat with the support they receive from the low-cost clinic. These community members also experiment with the feeling of belonging to a fast-growing animal welfare community, by being able to take care of animals they find in distress, and benefitting of the emotional reward this also brings.

The program has also contributed to bring the community in line with OIE standards on a sustainable basis. Access to these veterinary services has been a key aspect to the success and sustainability of the project. The empowerment of these individuals has resulted in an increase of assisted animals from 2,677 in 2012, to 11,218 in 2015.

Key words: roaming dogs, feral cats, behavior change, community engagement, veterinary services, sterilization, vaccination.