I gave her about three weeks to consider the material and then called to ask what she thought of the program. 

I emphasized that it would be self-supporting and would make a meaningful contribution toward correcting the surplus animal problem in Ft. Wayne. The cost savings would be attractive to those who like animals and those who don’t. Any elected official will recognize this as a vote-getting issue.

The council member was impressed enough to make a short radio presentation to explain the program. Later, she was instrumental in influencing other council members.

Next, I decided to go where the animal problems really exist: in the neighborhoods. Ft. Wayne has an organization of many neighborhood associations. The central-south section of the city has the Central-South Alliance of Neighborhood Associations, which would eventually become a major supporter.

I visited one of the neighborhood association presidents to explain the Los Angeles program and give him material to study. Again, after allowing ample time, I called to ask what he thought of it. He was impressed and invited me to lunch along with another neighborhood association president to discuss the program.

Both presidents pledged their support and help and gave me a list of the 60 neighborhood associations in the city. I sent each association the following endorsement to sign and return to me:

The members of Association are concerned with the stray animal population of the neighborhood. Animals which do not receive proper care and supervision present threats to our community. For reasons of safety and sanitation we see a need to eliminate uncontrolled animal breeding; therefore we support and endorse a low cost spay and neutering program for Ft. Wayne.

As I received the endorsements signed by the association officers, I made copies and sent one to each member of the city council along with information on the Los Angeles program. Accompanying the endorsements was a letter from a group of citizens asking the council to heed the endorsements and initiate an improved animal control program for Ft. Wayne. A letter to the city council president read in part:

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HSUS Director of Animal Sheltering and Control Phyllis Wright Editor, Shelter Sense Susan Bury Stauffer

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Los Angeles Superior Court Appellate Department judges have ruled that dog licenses can be required in a community, even though cat licenses are not. The Los Angeles Times reported that the ruling was made when a citizen convicted of a misdemeanor for failing to license his dogs appealed the conviction.

The resident claimed the license ordinance violated the equal protection clause of the US Constitution because cat owners are not required to license their pets. He contended that the city raises about $1.5 million from dog licensing, but spends more than a third of that controlling cats.

The judges ruled that this does not make the ordinance unconstitutional, and that classifying animals for licensing is not prohibited by the equal protection clause. The Times quotes their opinion as saying, “The remedy of the dog owner who feels that cats should also be licensed is in another arena - the legislative and executive departments of the City of Los Angeles.”

Bringing older people together with pets benefits both in a program co-sponsored by the American Humane Education Society (AMES) and the Junior League of Boston.

For three years, the two groups have been placing pets in rest homes, adding a dimension to the residents’ lives and providing good homes for the animals.

The Junior League makes the initial telephone contact with the nursing homes and meets with the administrator. If the first meeting is favorable, AMES representatives then visit the nursing home to show slides on pet ownership to the residents. They take a pet along to observe the reactions of the elderly people to an animal.

AMES Director Judith Star says it is important that “the residents and the administrators...be made aware of potential problems and natural inconvenience of owning a pet. Many people who have had little experience with animals think they are made of plastic. If the people involved in the program are not enthusiastic and well-prepared, the animal will be returned and the program will be discontinued.”

If the meeting is successful, AMES then selects from the Massachusetts SPCA animal shelters a medium-size short hair dog, at least two years old, housebroken and generally quiet. It is observed for a few days, then health-checked and bathed.

Then it is “adopted” by the nursing home administrator, who takes responsibility for the animal, and taken to its new home. Star observes that “most dogs can sense the frailties of older people and they instinctively become gentle with them. On the whole, this has been a most worthwhile program for everyone concerned.”

For further details on starting a pet placement program, write American Humane Education Society, 350 S. Huntington Ave., Boston, MA 02130. For a list of publications on pet therapy and organizations with programs, write SHELTER SENSE, 2100 L St., NW, Washington, DC 20037.