

Guidelines for Establishing an Effective Adoption Program

This section of the handbook provides guidelines to help rescuers rehome, or adopt out, friendly stray cats and any feral cats and kittens who have been socialized. As mentioned previously, removing and rehoming friendly cats from outdoor colonies is part of a successful Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR) program, because it helps decrease the number of cats living in a colony (making the colony more manageable).



Louise Holton

The top priority of every adoption program is the health and well-being of the cat.

Plus, if the resources are available to place them into homes, it is not necessary for socialized cats to live in colonies — unlike their feral counterparts, who are not well-suited for adoption into a home. (However, some adult feral cats can be “adopted” by their caretakers and, over time, they may become assimilated to living indoors. Refer to “Adopting Adult Feral Cats” for more information, and see also “Guidelines for Safely Relocating Feral Cats” when rehoming feral cats.)

Rescuers can work on their own to place cats and kittens into homes or they may choose to work with an organization that already has an established adoption pro-

gram. Depending on the number of cats and kittens one is rehoming, it might be more practical to contact a local rescue organization for assistance, since they already have the resources in place. Though please note, most rescue organizations are always “full,” meaning they do not have open space to accept new cats, so it is usually necessary for individual rescuers to work on their own to rehome cats.

However, many rescue organizations do have a waiting list and may offer to add individual rescuer names to the list and contact them once space becomes available to take in new cats. Therefore, it is recommended that individual rescuers

have their names added to these waiting lists and work with established rescue organizations in conjunction with rehoming cats on their own. Finding suitable homes for adoptable cats can be challenging, so all available resources should be utilized.

Tips for Rehoming Cats and Kittens

In rehoming cats, word of mouth is the most useful tool one can have. Simply talking with friends, family, coworkers, neighbors, and even your local postal workers, school bus drivers, and landscapers can lead to finding suitable homes for adoptable cats. Engaging in friendly conversation regarding companion animals can help one provide information about a cat or kitten who is in need of a home. And having a few cute photographs on hand to show prospective adopters is a bonus; remember the adage, a picture is worth a thousand words?



Alley Cat Rescue

ACR volunteer, Victoria, at an adoption event.

To aid in conversation, creating a simple flyer for each cat or litter of kittens you are trying to rehome can be another great adoption tool. The more visibility you can provide for the cat, the increased chances you will have of finding her a home. Include important information such as: the cat has been spayed or neutered; she is current on vaccinations; she has been tested for disease, treated for parasites, and microchipped; and mention if she gets along well with other cats or dogs. (It is highly recommended that all cats and kittens are spayed or neutered prior to rehoming to prevent unwanted litters. Plus, a sterilized and vaccinated cat offers more incentive for potential adopters and for rescue organizations to work with you, because you have already done some of the hard work for them.) Also include your contact information, such as phone number and/or email address, but do not give out your home address — only provide personal information to those you know and trust.

Each flyer should include at least one photograph, though additional photos can be more appealing, and consider adding some information regarding the cat's personality or intriguing traits, such as: she is a lap cat, she is highly independent, the cat loves to sit in windows, or she is great with children. Keep in mind to only provide information that will help get potential adopters to contact you. If the cat has special needs (such as a shy cat, a senior cat, or an FIV+ cat), you can ease into these details once you have the person on the phone and you can provide more information in conversational form.

Adding these details to a flyer can be off-putting to some adopters, because they don't necessarily know what these details mean. Explaining special-needs cases to potential adopters via conversation and providing supplemental information can make all the difference in finding special-needs cats suitable homes. Though please make sure all important details are disclosed to adopters to prevent the cat from being returned or abandoned.

Supply flyers to those you speak with and ask them to share with their friends and family. Contact local businesses and see if they would be willing to hang your flyers for clients to see. Think animal-friendly businesses like veterinarian hospitals and pet-supply stores; though other businesses may be willing to help if the owner and/or staff likes animals.

Take advantage of social media to help find homes for adoptable cats and kittens. With countless individuals having access to the Internet, using social media sites like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram will greatly increase visibility and the potential of finding the perfect home. These sites offer quick and easy sharing with the click of a button! Or consider creating your own blog or website. With numerous how-to videos and tutorials available online, following a few simple steps can help you create your own online adoption site.

You can also ask local rescue organizations if they would be willing to post your cats on their website or to their Petfinder.com and Pets911.com accounts, if they

utilize those sites. Again, rescue organizations might not be able to physically house cats you are trying to rehome, but they might be willing to provide you with online assistance, so it never hurts to ask. Please note, we do not recommend using websites like Craigslist to rehome cats, for they can attract individuals who may not have good intentions for animals.

Another great idea for rehoming cats is to give potential adopters the option of first fostering a cat or kitten. Providing a trial period is a great way to help some individuals get over the fear of commitment. When a person is permitted to foster a cat for a month or two, to see if the cat will be happy in her new home and to see if the cat will get along with other cats, dogs, or even children, this can help relieve some of the initial hesitation and reservation. This is also a great way to see if this is the right home for the cat; some cats have a more difficult time adjusting to new surroundings and to new people and animals. In addition, fostering can serve as a way to screen potential adopters to ensure they will be responsible guardians. An initial foster period is beneficial for both parties involved and ensures a better fit for all.

Lastly, be creative, persistent, and patient! Think outside of the box when trying to rehome a cat. Share cute stories or stories of triumph and use great photos to pull on the heart strings of people. Explain why a particular cat is so special and how wonderful it would be if she was adopted. Paint a picture for people. And don't give up! Rehoming a cat can

be challenging, so remember to be persistent (utilizing all available tools) and be patient. You might not rehome a cat overnight, but with some time and some effort you will find the right home for her.



Alley Cat Rescue

Four-day-old kitten fostered by ACR.

Adoption Guidelines and Forms

These next few paragraphs and accompanying forms, which can be found in the back of the handbook, are meant to help guide individual rescuers who are rehoming cats and kittens on their own. If you are working with a rescue organization to place cats, they will most likely have their own guidelines and forms to use, so be sure to inquire about their specific formalities.

Prior to rehoming a cat or kitten, Alley Cat Rescue provides all potential adopters with an adoption application and a list of guidelines they will be expected to follow. ACR wants to see our rescued

cats placed in homes where they will be treated as a member of the family for the rest of their lives which, with care, can be from 15 to 20 years. Therefore, if some potential adopters do not feel they can appropriately adhere to our guidelines, then we suggest they reconsider whether or not adopting a cat at this time is right for them.

As part of an initial screening for adopters, you may also want to consider requesting a few references, including their veterinarian. This will allow you to ask a few friends, family members, or colleagues about the potential adopters' previous companion animals, if they had any, and to gauge if the individual has the appropriate time and space to devote to a new companion animal. You could either call the references or email them a short questionnaire.

Upon adopting a cat from ACR, individuals must sign a legal contract stating compliance with our requirements, which are in the best interests of the cat. Again, in reading over the adoption contract, if any potential adopters do not feel they are able to comply fully, it is recommended that they abstain from adopting a cat at this time. ACR would rather an individual be upfront about their reservations and possible non-compliance with our guidelines and contracts, than adopt out a cat only to have her returned or abandoned.

To ensure a recently adopted cat is adjusting well to her new environment, ACR highly recommends conducting a

post-adoption follow-up. This can be in the form of an email, a phone call, or a pre-scheduled visit. Following up with recent adopters not only gives you peace of mind, but it also allows for individuals to ask questions or express any concerns. Most adopters are happy to hear from you and are excited to share news regarding their new family member.

Important Notes

- Work in conjunction with a rescue organization, even if it is just for advice or online posting assistance. It never hurts to ask.
- Offer a foster period to potential adopters to help alleviate any initial hesitation and/or reservations. Be willing to work with adopters.
- Ask potential adopters for a few references (including their veterinarian), so you can better ensure the cat will be adopted by a responsible, caring individual.
- If possible, offer adopters the ability to contact you post-adoption with questions or concerns.
- Please note that only some rescue organizations have a no-kill policy, meaning they do not euthanize healthy animals, and all animals are kept until adopted. County-run shelters in particular usually do NOT operate under a no-kill policy, meaning they will euthanize healthy animals if they need to free up space for incoming animals. Most county-run shelters have a time limit of a few days to adopt out animals, but once that specified limit is reached, the animal is killed. In one sampling of shelters and other organizations, shelters were found to euthanize 71 to 72 percent of all cats who enter (The NCPPSP, 1997). So before you agree to work with an organization, ask them specifically if they operate under a no-kill policy.
- It is highly recommended that all cats and kittens who are up for adoption are spayed or neutered prior to being rehomed. Remember, these cats and kittens came from outdoor colonies with unsterilized cats. The key to a successful TNR program and to ending cat homelessness is through spaying and neutering.
- It is highly recommended that all cats and kittens are properly vaccinated prior to rehoming. Providing vaccines prevents disease and other health conditions, some of which can be fatal. It is always best to ensure a cat or kitten receives her initial vaccinations, so her immune system can build up antibodies to resist potential future exposures.
- It is highly recommended that all cats and kittens are treated for internal and external parasites prior to rehoming. These parasites can cause health issues and should be prevented.
- It is highly recommended that all cats and kittens are tested for FeLV and FIV prior to rehoming. Testing a cat prior to adoption can prevent cats

from being returned, abandoned, or killed, should she be later tested and found to be positive for either disease. Some veterinarians still recommend to their clients to euthanize FeLV and FIV positive cats, which is not necessary. Therefore, it is safer to test the cat prior to rehoming so potential adopters are aware of her special needs.

- Always keep safety in mind. Never give out your personal information, such as your home address, whether it be listed on a flyer, a website, or to someone you recently met. Instead only provide your phone number and/or email address as the primary method for contacting you. And suggest meeting potential adopters at their house, so you can inspect the home and gauge if you think it is a safe environment for the cat; take a friend with you or let someone know where you will be.
- Never use the words “Free to good home” on flyers or online sites. Advertising “free” animals can attract individuals who may not have good intentions for the animals. Unfortunately, some people who are looking only to make money and do not care for the well-being of animals are drawn to such ads, particularly those looking to sell animals to research laboratories or breeding facilities. Sometimes it can be helpful to mention an adoption fee to dissuade these individuals and to only attract those who are truly interested in adoption. Plus, asking for a small adoption fee can help recoup some of your veterinary costs, and allow you to rescue more cats. Avoid using websites like Craigslist when rehoming cats; there have been reports of individuals with bad intentions adopting cats from such sites.