

# CAT CUDDLING AT THE



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**Thank you** for taking this first step towards a wonderful journey with the animals you love! Spending time with our homeless dogs, cats, and rabbits is a joy, and benefits them, and you, in so many ways.

**Before proceeding**, please check out the **Volunteer FAQ's** to make sure you qualify for volunteering with our animals!

**Our cats are looking for best friends** who will visit at least once a week. Please examine your busy schedule to make sure you can make this commitment to them.

**We strongly encourage you to stop in** the Western PA Humane Society and observe how current volunteers interact with the animals to make sure our volunteer experience meets your expectations. Weekends and evenings are great times to interact with current volunteers, ask questions, and make sure that volunteering at our shelter is the opportunity you are looking for.

The following pages will provide you with information you need to safely interact with our cats, along with information on volunteer basics, staff and visitor interaction. **It is very important that you study and learn the information in these pages before completing the Cat Cuddling Quiz and attending a New Volunteer Orientation.**

**Your New Volunteer Orientation** will be a hands-on animal handling workshop with plenty of opportunities to ask questions. It will include a tour of the shelter and introductions to some of our dedicated staff.

**Now it's time to put on your thinking cap** and enter the wonderful world of volunteering at the Western PA Humane Society! We hope to receive your Cat Cuddling 101 Quiz soon, and can't wait to meet you in person and introduce you to the animals at the Western PA Humane Society!

**Thank you for all you do for the animals . . .**

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# Volunteering

## B • A • S • I • C • S

### ***Scheduling***

#### **Volunteering with the animals ...**

We encourage our volunteers to give a special priority to spending time with our wonderful animals, and to make volunteer visits to the shelter a regular routine in your life. When you come in at least once a week to walk the dogs, cuddle the kitties, or snuggle with the bunnies, you become part of our family. Staff will know you by name, and the animals will recognize you as their special friend. You'll develop friendships with other regular volunteers, and will truly reap the emotional benefits from all the love our animals have to give. **We ask for a minimum two hour commitment a week for a minimum period of six months.** We have no set schedule for animal handling volunteers; whenever the shelter is open, our animals and our staff welcome your visits.



#### **Departmental Volunteering ...**

Helping our staff with departmental duties requires, by necessity, a regular schedule. Most departmental volunteer schedules are very flexible, but staff needs to know when you will be in attendance to provide training and to ensure that work is available for you. A current listing of departmental needs, scheduling requirements, and staff contact information is available on the volunteer page of our website. You may find an opportunity that is suited to your skill sets and desires and one that fits perfectly into your schedule.

#### ***New Volunteer Orientations ...***

We hold separate orientations for dog, cat, and rabbit volunteers. After attending a particular orientation, you will be qualified to interact with that animal. If you wish to interact with other types of animals, you need to attend the appropriate orientation. You may register to attend another animal orientation by following the procedures outlined on the volunteer page of our website.



#### ***Identification ...***

After you complete an orientation class, you will receive a volunteer button which identifies you as having learned the skills needed to be a Dog Walker, Cat Cuddler, or Bunny Buddy. **You must wear your volunteer button each time you come into the shelter to interact with our animals.**

#### ***Dress Code ...***

Comfortable clothing, with an emphasis on slip-resistant footwear, is appropriate for day-to-day volunteering. Please be aware that anything you wear to the shelter may become dirty or stained while interacting with our animals. T-shirts or clothing with offensive or questionable messages should be avoided. Volunteer T-shirts may be required for certain events or offsite opportunities, and these will be provided by the shelter.

#### ***Safety ...***

We are committed to the safety of our animals, our volunteers, our staff, and visitors to our shelter. Volunteers are required to learn and follow these safety guidelines at all times. **Because this is so important, a volunteer who does not follow safe handling procedures will immediately lose his/her volunteer privileges or be required to complete another new volunteer orientation.**

#### ***Recording your volunteer time ...***

At the New Volunteer Orientation you will learn how to record your time in our easy-to-use digital Time Log. Animal handling, fund-raising, mailings completed from home, offsite event attendance ... all the things you do should be recorded. We have special rewards for certain milestones in attendance and we give special recognition to your contribution of time at our annual Volunteer Awards Dinner. The time you and other volunteers spend with our animals also helps us when we apply for grants and other donations for our programs.



### ***Documentation ...***

If you need official documentation of your volunteer time, please contact the Director of Volunteer and Foster Programs at least 24 hours before you need a documentation letter. We have a standard letter, on our letterhead, for documentation of hours. The Director will also be happy to sign any forms to document your attendance.

### ***Extended Absence ...***

If you do not come in to the shelter for a period of two months or more, we will remove your name from the digital time log and change your volunteer status to "Inactive." You will lose your volunteer privileges and cannot interact with our animals until you are reinstated as an Active volunteer. If you wish to reinstate your "Active" status, you may contact the Director of Volunteer and Foster Programs to learn any important changes that may have occurred in your absence. You may need to attend another New Volunteer Orientation, at the discretion of staff.

### ***If you decide that volunteering here is not for you ...***

Please contact the Director of Volunteer and Foster Programs if you wish to discontinue volunteering at our shelter. We would like to know your reasons and review any of your concerns so that we can continue to improve the volunteer experience.

### ***Communication ...***

Any questions you may have, whether it is concerning a particular animal, a shelter policy, or a general question, should be directed to the Director of Volunteer and Foster Programs by calling, emailing, or speaking in person. Customer Service and Operations staff are generally very busy, and should not be interrupted in their duties. An exception to this is reporting an animal illness or behavior or a kennel need to staff.

The Director of Volunteer and Foster Programs will communicate regularly with you through emails. This is the quickest and most efficient way to get the message out to our large volunteer corps. If you do not have an email address, all emails are printed out and posted on the Volunteer Bulletin Board at the Volunteer Station.

You should check the Volunteer Bulletin Board regularly, as new volunteer opportunities, changes to animal handling protocols, and event postings can be found there.

### ***Pets ...***

Volunteers should not bring their pets to the shelter while volunteering, nor should pets be left unattended in your vehicle.

### ***Family Volunteering ...***

The minimum age for volunteering at The Western Pennsylvania Humane Society is 16, however children over the age of 12 may volunteer with our cats or rabbits when accompanied by a parent or guardian. Both child and parent or guardian must complete the Steps To Volunteering.

### ***Volunteers with Disabilities ...***

We welcome volunteers with physical, mental, or behavioral challenges, as long as these challenges do not compromise the health and safety of our animals, our staff, other volunteers and visitors to the shelter. Volunteers with disabilities may require the help of a job coach or other social services provider to perform their volunteer duties. Please contact the Director of Volunteer and Foster Programs to arrange an interview to discuss the special needs of volunteers with disabilities.



## Visitor Interaction

As you spend time in the shelter with our animals you will meet all types of visitors, most of whom are looking for a new four-legged addition to their family. Our adoption staff helps match our animals to potential adopters on the basis of adopters' lifestyles, family members, and our animals' behavioral characteristics and needs.

If you do not feel comfortable interacting with visitors, politely direct them to a member of our adoption staff whose offices are located in the main adoption hallway (Adoption Counseling Rooms).

Always be polite, helpful, and respectful to visitors—these individuals and families are the new pet parents our animals are waiting for!

As a volunteer you are welcome to share with potential adopters your knowledge of our cats', dogs', or bunnies' personalities, activity levels, and other information that appears in their kennel paperwork. **The most important thing is to be honest about our animals!** For instance, you would not want to recommend a very shy cat to a household with three exuberant children, even though this cat may be one of your favorites and may have the coloration the family is looking for. A better choice for this family would be the self-confident cat who is reaching through the cage bars and is ready for anything!

The longer an animal's stay with us, the more tempting it is to find him a home, any home, just to get him out of his cage. Misrepresenting a dog's (or any animal's) activity level or behavioral characteristics to potential adopters will only lead to unhappy adopters and a returned animal.

Educate visitors about the basic needs of the dog, cat, or rabbit in whom they are interested. If you don't know these needs, educate yourself before giving out advice.

If a visitor asks you a question to which you don't know the answer, politely direct the visitor to a staff member. By studying these pages and perusing the Western PA Humane Society website, you will learn answers to visitors' commonly asked questions.

If at any time you feel a visitor would be an undesirable adopter, through an overheard conversation or inappropriate behavior in our facility, immediately report your observations to one of our staff.

**Please do not interact with visitors who are relinquishing animals to the shelter, nor with the animals being relinquished.**



## Animal Interaction with Visitors

Visitors to the shelter are not allowed to open cage doors or remove animals from their cages. Our adoption staff will introduce potential adopters to our animals, and counsel them on which animals would be great additions to their family. On very busy adoption days, staff may ask volunteers to help show animals to potential adopters. Always ask our adoption staff if you may show an animal to a potential adopter.

**Additional training is needed for volunteers who wish to help with animal introductions and adoption counseling. Contact the Director of our Adoptions Department if you are interested in this training.**

## **Staff Interaction**

Staff at the Western PA Humane Society greatly appreciates the dedication and compassion of our volunteers and the great benefit they provide to our animals' well-being.

Each of our staff members has specific responsibilities in the shelter. Whether their duties involve feeding our animals, cleaning cages, vaccinating, providing veterinary care, medicating sick or injured animals, evaluating behavior, interacting with potential adopters or people relinquishing animals, raising much-needed funds, scheduling events or answering phones, each staff duty is a very important part of our organization. A listing of departments, department heads, and general responsibilities of each department is available on the volunteer page of our website.

**We welcome volunteer questions.** It is by asking questions that you learn things that, because of time constraints, we were not able to cover at your orientation.

If you have a question about policies, procedures, animal care, or anything else, your question should be directed to the Director of Volunteer and Foster Programs who will do her best to provide you with an immediate answer or to find the answer to your question. You may call, email, or ask the Director of Volunteer and Foster Programs to come to the Front Desk. If the Director of Volunteer and Foster Programs is unavailable, you may ask another staff member to answer your question.

Please do not interrupt staff while they are busy performing their duties (i.e. adopting animals, accepting relinquished animals, in the middle of a phone conversation), especially in our Adoption or Intake rooms. Save your question until a staff member has the time to devote to you.

## **Urgent Medical or Behavioral Questions**

If an animal has an urgent medical need, or if you need to report disease symptoms you've observed in a shelter animal, go to our Welcome Center for help. If you or a visitor has been bitten or otherwise injured by a shelter animal or on shelter premises, immediately report this injury to a staff member at the Welcome Center.

We encourage you to check out our Departmental Volunteer Opportunities. Departmental Opportunities are a great way to take your volunteer experience to a new level, to closely interact with staff, and to gain training and experience in different aspects of animal care in a shelter environment.

Some of these opportunities require an increased level of commitment and special skill sets, so please examine your time schedule and individual abilities before applying.



## **OFFSITE ADOPTION EVENTS**

Taking our shelter animals into local communities at our regularly scheduled Offsite Adoption Events greatly increases their chances of meeting their forever families. It is immensely fulfilling to know that, when someone falls in love with your dog, cat, or bunny at one of these events, YOU were responsible for that perfect match!

Qualified volunteers are cordially invited to join our Volunteer Events Crews and give shelter animals a chance to get out of their cages and perhaps meet that special someone who will fall in love and adopt.

Offsite Adoption Events are lots of fun, and showing off our wonderful animals is a joy! The more volunteers who participate, the more dogs, cats and bunnies we can bring.

Check out our Offsite Events Calendar on the Volunteer Bulletin Board. You are sure to find an opportunity that fits in with your schedule! Our Offsite Events Coordinator will love to include you and a shelter animal in an upcoming event, and is happy to answer any of your questions about this exciting volunteer opportunity. Call (412) 321-4625 x 244 and let her know you are interested! She will include your e-mail address in her distribution list and update you regularly about our scheduled events.

# CAT CUDDLING 101

**IMPORTANT!** Learning the information in this section is the first step in the new volunteer process. Completing the quiz, receiving an invitation to attend a New Volunteer Orientation, and attending a New Volunteer Orientation is required before coming in to spend time with our animals as a volunteer.

***If you are familiar with cats,*** you know the one thing they hate most is CHANGE. It is very stressful for a cat to move into the Shelter environment. New scents, lots of other cats, exposure to the inevitable viruses . . . it's a scary situation for them, and all that stress causes immune system disfunction. That's where you come in! You bring them out of their "shell." Your gentle touch and soft voice tells them that everything's all right. The socialization you give them makes them eminently more adoptable and prepares our cats and kittens for their forever homes.

## WHAT DO CAT CUDDLERS DO AT THE WESTERN PA HUMANE SOCIETY?

Cat Cuddlers pet our cats in their cages, take willing cats out of their cages for some cuddle time or some exercise in the Cat Meeting Room, groom our cats, Clicker Train our cats to make them more adoptable and teach them great "tricks", and take shelter cats to regularly scheduled offsite adoption events.

Fostering a cat, litter of kittens, or mother cat with her babies in your home is another way to help our animals. More information on fostering is available on our web page or at the front desk at the Western PA Humane Society.

## BEHAVIOR

Potential adopters look for friendly, social, well-groomed cats. Our interaction with the cats and kittens should encourage them to come to the front of the cage, make eye contact, and invite potential adopters' attention.

Shy cats' behavior can be shaped gradually with positive rewards for desired behavior—treats, gentle petting, and interaction with toys. Don't expect immediate results . . . our cats have been through a major life change and it may take some time for them to warm up to human interaction.

Slow, quiet movement, no loud, startling noises, a gentle, low tone of voice, and respect for their wishes can bring even the most reticent cats and kittens out of their shell. You should never ask a cat to do something she is uncomfortable doing.

**Clicker Training** also works wonders for those shy cats who stay to the back of the cage or hide in their litter box area. **Clicker Training Classes for Shelter Cats** are held regularly, and upcoming classes will be announced in Volunteer E-newsletters.



## ***KITTENS!***

**Kittens are entertaining, incredibly cute, and a joy to interact with! Kitten cages in our shelter are locked, and at orientation you will learn how to access these adorable little creatures. All of the safety and disease prevention protocols are especially important when handling our adorable babies!**

## SAFETY

- Your main focus should **ALWAYS** be on the cat you are handling. Pay close attention to your cat's body language, and be alert to signs of over stimulation. **At the very first sign of over stimulation, stop interaction, close the cage door, sanitize your hands, and give your attention to another cat.**
- Never allow a cat to get loose in the Cat Adoption Area! If a cat should get away from you and hide under the cages, do not attempt to get him out yourself. Press the button on the wall by the door to summon a Customer Service Representative to retrieve the cat.
- When you take a cat from her cage, make sure the cat is facing away from the bank of cages. Some cats are disturbed by the presence of other cats, and may become aggressive if they see the cats in other cages.
- Make sure cage doors, both main cage and litterbox areas, are securely latched before leaving the cage.
- Immediately report any bites, scratches or other injuries to staff.

## HEALTH AND DISEASE PREVENTION

**Cats are easily stressed. Any change in their lives, surgical or medical intervention, causes them stress. Stress causes their immune system to drop, and invites illness. The protocols below are very important to keep our shelter cats and kittens healthy, and to reduce disease transmission.**

- Wash or sanitize your hands before interacting with our cats, and in-between handling each cat. Alcohol-based hand sanitizers are mounted on the wall, and you may wash your hands in the Utility Room.
- Do not transfer toys, food/water bowls, or blankets from one cage to another.
- Grooming tools used on one cat should never be used on another. Staff will need to sanitize combs, brushes, etc. after they are used on a cat. You may leave used grooming tools and any other items that need sanitized on the left side of the sink in the Utility Room, and our staff will clean and sanitize them.
- If you remove a cat from his cage, make sure that cat is returned to the same cage—make a mental note!
- Never allow cats from different cages to interact with each other.
- Interact quietly with our cats. Don't yell, don't speak in a loud voice, and please don't slam the cage doors.
- Immediately report any signs of illness (sneezing, lethargy, discharge from the eyes or nose, drooling, very loose stool, vomiting) to staff at the front desk or clinic desk.



### ***Signs of Over Stimulation***

**EARS**—ears should be pointing straight up. If the ears begin to flatten against the head, your cat is becoming over stimulated.

**EYES**—pupils (center black area of the cat's eyes) should be slits or ovals. If pupils begin to dilate (become larger), your cat is becoming over stimulated.

**TAIL**—a happy cat's tail is lying still or waving slowly in enjoyment. If the tail movement speeds up, if the tail thumps against the cage, or if the fur of the tail puffs out, your cat is becoming over stimulated.

**FUR**—a happy cat's fur is smooth and unruffled. If the fur begins to stand up on the neck and down the center of the back, your cat is becoming over stimulated.

**BODY**—a happy cat's body is relaxed. If you notice a stiffening or rigidity to the body, your cat is becoming over stimulated.

**By removing your attention at the very first sign of over stimulation, you will gradually desensitize our cats to over stimulation, and this will encourage happier, more adoptable kitty behavior.**

**It will also prevent you from getting hissed or growled at, scratched, or bitten.**



## ***THE KITTY COMPLEX***—Cat rooms and their uses

### **CAT ADOPTION AREA**

Our main adoption room is where our adoptable cats and kittens live, and where potential adopters may choose a new feline family member. Because the door to this room opens to the main adoption hallway, and because loose cats will quickly seek refuge under the cages, cats are not allowed to roam freely in this room.

### **FELINE PLAY AREA**

The Feline Play Area is our “colony room,” where multiple cats can be comfortably housed, and where special needs kitties can be showcased. Sometimes we have otherwise healthy cats with chronic upper respiratory symptoms who call the Feline Play Area their temporary home. This area has also housed multiple older animals who have been surrendered together, large litters of kittens, baby bunnies and, on occasion, puppies. Volunteers may interact with the cats/kittens in this room, but no other cats should be taken into this area. The door to this room should always remain closed. When unoccupied by a resident group of cats, this room is used for an alternate meeting/exercise room.

### **CAT MEETING ROOM**

The Cat Meeting Room is where potential adopters may get acquainted with our cats, and where volunteers may take a cat for some exercise or special play time. Potential adopters always have priority use of this room, so you and your shelter kitty may have to cut short your playtime if staff needs to introduce a kitty to potential adopters. Volunteers may take only one cat at a time into the Cat Meeting Room. However, if two or more cats share a cage in the adoption room, they may be taken into the Cat Meeting Room to interact together.

### **UTILITY ROOM/CAT PREP**

The Utility Room (Cat Prep Area) contains all of the supplies our cats and kittens need. Cat and kitten food, blankets, litter, bowls, toys, grooming tools, etc. are stored here. Volunteers may take supplies from this room to replenish our cats’ dry food, scoop litter boxes, or re-fill water bowls.

### **CAGE DESIGN**

Our permanent cages in Cat Adoption are designed to reduce stress and to reduce disease transmission. They are roomy, the added shelf increases the cats’ perceived space, and the separate litter box area (through the round opening in the wall of each cage) adds to our kitties’ feeling of well-being. The classical background music also serves to relax our shelter cats and kittens.