

Cat Cuddling at the...



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www.wpahumane.org

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 Requirements to make sure you qualify for volunteering with our animals! You must be at least 16 years of age to walk dogs.

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.

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 lecture-style workshop with plenty of opportunities to ask questions. You will be taught all about the Western PA Humane Society, its cats, and how to interact with them!

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...

Jane Marcus
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Volunteering Basics

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, you are welcome to be here starting at 7am daily until the kennel closes. The animals and staff welcome your visits.



New Volunteer Orientations

We hold separate orientations for dog, cat, and rabbit volunteers. You will need to attend the specific orientation for the species that you wish to interact with. You may attend all three orientations if you would like to work with all three species!

Identification

After you attend an orientation, you will receive a volunteer button which identifies you as having learned the skills needed to be a Cat Cuddler. **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 non-slip 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 Volgistics, our volunteer management software. Animal handling, fund-raising, event attendance ... everything you do should be recorded. The recorded time you and other volunteers spend with our animals helps us when we apply for grants and other donations for our volunteer programs!



Documentation

If you need official documentation of your volunteer time, please contact the Volunteer Manager at least 24 hours before you need a documentation letter.

Extended Absence

If you do not come in to the shelter for a period of four 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 Volunteer Manager 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 Volunteer Manager 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 Volunteer Manager 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 Volunteer Manager 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 Welcome Center.

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 12. Children between the ages of 12-15 may volunteer with our cats and rabbits when accompanied by a parent or guardian. Both child and parent or guardian must complete the volunteer quiz and attend an orientation. Children over the age of 16 may volunteer on their own and with our cats, rabbits, and dogs.

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 Volunteer Manager 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 adoptions 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 or direct them to the front desk.

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 personalities, activity levels, and other information that appears in their kennel paperwork. **The most important thing is to be honest about our animals! Make sure you are educated about an animal before giving out advice.** 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 be the age/color the family is looking for. A better choice for this family would be the self-confident cat who is recommended for kids of all ages!

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 cat's (or any animal's) activity level or behavioral characteristics to potential adopters will only lead to unhappy adopters and a returned animal.

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, because of an overheard conversation or inappropriate behavior in our facility, immediately report your observations to one of our staff member.

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 adoptions 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 Volunteer Manager if you are interested in this opportunity.



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.



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 Volunteer Manager, who will do their best to provide you with an answer or find the answer to your question. If they are 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 Volunteer Welcome Center or Front Desk 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 any staff member.

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 cat 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.

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 dysfunction. 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 exceedingly 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 to make them more adoptable and teach them great "tricks," and take shelter cats to 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 reserved cats and kittens out of their shell. You should never ask a cat to do something he/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.

KITTENS!

Kittens are entertaining, incredibly cute, and a joy to interact with! Please keep in mind all of the safety and disease prevention protocols are especially important when handling our adorable babies!

HEALTH AND DISEASE PREVENTION

Cats are easily stressed. Any change in their lives, surgical or medical intervention, can cause them stress. Just like humans, stress causes their immune system to drop, and they are more susceptible to 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 restroom.
- 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.
- If you remove a cat from his cage, make sure that cat is returned to the same cage.
- 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.

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 overstimulation, 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. Please find a staff member to retrieve the cat.
- When you take a cat from his/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.

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 overstimulated.

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 overstimulated.

By removing your attention at the very first sign of over stimulation, you will gradually desensitize our cats to overstimulation, and this will encourage happier, more adoptable kitty behavior. It will also prevent you from getting hissed or growled at, scratched, or bitten.



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 hallway, and because loose cats will quickly seek refuge under the cages, cats are not allowed to roam freely in this room.

Colony Room: Our colony rooms are where multiple adoptable cats can be comfortably housed, as an alternative to living in cages. The cats who live in these rooms must get along with other cats, and must not be harboring any communicable diseases. 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.

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.

CAGE DESIGN: Our permanent cages in our Cat Adoption Area are designed to reduce stress and to reduce disease transmission. They are roomy, the added shelf increases the cats' perceived space, and a separate litter box area and separate sleeping quarters adds to our kitties' feeling of well-being. The classical background music also serves to relax our shelter cats and kittens.