

Town Cats of Morgan Hill  
Foster Manual

# TOWN CATS OF MORGAN HILL



## Foster Manual: Rules & Process

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# **WELCOME TO FOSTERING**

Thank you for your interest in becoming a Town Cats foster parent! Together we can save more lives. We need your help to achieve our goal of providing the best possible environment for each cat in our care with the ultimate goal of finding the right match for each cat and each person, adopting each cat into a good forever home. Our goal is to help as many cats as possible by taking in friendly, adoptable, homeless cats and getting them adopted as quickly as possible into good homes. By becoming a foster parent and opening your home as a temporary sanctuary, you generously give the cat the time and attention she or he needs to ensure good health, socialization and development. Good foster families are crucial to our mission. Foster volunteers are these cats' lifeline, their opportunity to a better life. We thank you for your dedication, hard work and your partnership in offering home care to cats in need. We hope you find fostering as rewarding as we do and that you foster with us for years to come.

## **Who We Are**

Town Cats is a private, volunteer-based, 501(c) 3 nonprofit organization dedicated exclusively to the welfare of cats. We sponsor innovative programs to help cats and serve as a community resource in Santa Clara County. We educate the public on cat issues and we promote the spaying/neutering of all companion animals and the TNR of community cats. We are a highly motivated team of passionate, compassionate animal lovers seeking to do as much good as we possibly can. Town Cats has deep roots in the community. We are a grassroots collective of cat-loving people brought together by common goals and our mission. The work of Town Cats is supported entirely by the generous hearts and hands of individuals and private foundations.

We maintain a limited admission shelter on San Pedro Ave in Morgan Hill and cat adoption centers throughout Santa Clara County with partnering pet food stores. We maintain an important network of foster volunteers who provide home care of cats, particularly of kittens but also of special needs cats and cats in need of hospice care. Through the help of our foster volunteers, we are able to increase our capacity to care for cats as well as provide homes for cats who otherwise may not be able to be helped.

Our foster volunteers open their hearts and homes to do this lifesaving work, bottle-feeding pre-weans and giving friendly, healthy, homeless cats the time and space they need until they are ready to be put up for adoption and be adopted into a forever home. We hold weekend adoption fairs at our adoption center sites with the support of our pet food store partners; we strive to secure loving, permanent homes for the companion cats in our care.

In our Foster Program, our volunteers create a vital lifesaving link in the network that saves animals in Santa Clara County. The foster parents provide the personal care while Town Cats provides the medical care along with training.

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There are six common reasons cats/kittens are in foster care:

- The kittens are too young and/or underweight to be placed up for adoption
- A mother cat and her nursing kittens need a home environment where they can feel safe and receive proper socialization and love
- Cats may need time to recuperate from an illness or injury
- Cats may need socialization or behavior modification
- A senior cat or severely ill cat may need hospice care in their final days
- Town Cats is out of space in our own facilities to care for an incoming cat

As soon as the foster cats are ready to be adopted they are either placed in one of our adoption centers if there is space, or the foster parent brings the cats to be shown at the weekend adoption fairs while they continue to live with their foster parents during the week until they are adopted.

Town Cats receives numerous requests daily to take in cats. Unfortunately, we simply cannot humanely take in every stray, abandoned, or unwanted cat, including injured cats who a member of the community wants us to accept. We have limited resources and limited space. The pleas for help and the number of unwanted cats saddens us and strengthens our resolve to empower members of the public to work with us to solve cat-related issues in our community. Kitten season -- the birthing season of spring and summer -- is a particularly challenging time, as people reach out to us with litter after litter of helpless, orphaned kittens who they have found and want to surrender to us. We encourage the public to work with their local governmental agencies on the overpopulation problem.

It is not easy for us to say no to a request for help and turn a person in need and a cat in need away; however, when our adoption centers are full and when we do not have an available foster home, sadly we have no safe place to house an additional cat or litter of kittens and we must say no. We must protect and do right by the animals already in our care. Overcrowding causes stress and sickness and it is inhumane. We strive to provide the best care possible for our resident cats and foster cats; we want the cats in our care to thrive and we will not overcrowd them. To that end, we have policies and procedures in place. Please see our intake policy on our web site.

### **Skill Level**

- It is important to be honest with yourself when assessing your skill level in working with foster cats. It is best to raise one litter of kittens at a time and to keep your foster cats in quarantine, living in a separate space from your own resident pets. Do not accept a cat who requires more care than you can provide. Be realistic about your experience.
- The general categories are 1) pre-wean kittens (still nursing with mother cat or bottle-fed kittens if orphaned and no mother cat is available), 2) weaned/self-feeding kittens (no longer nursing; can eat solid food), 3) adult cats, 4) semi-feral kittens who can be tamed and socialized and 5) feral cats who cannot be tamed.
- Pre-wean kittens without a mother cat require round-the-clock care, just like human newborns, so you need the time, energy, and stamina to devote to them until they can eat and use the litter box on their own (about 4-5 weeks). Another major consideration is whether

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you can administer medications and deal with issues such as illness, diarrhea and potential death or euthanasia of a cat if a cat is so sick and suffering that euthanasia is necessary.

- Weaned/self-feeding kittens are a bit easier but they also present challenges as they frequently have diarrhea or get sick with upper respiratory disease (runny nose and eyes). You must be able to give the kittens proper care which means being able to treat the kittens when they get sick, administering oral medications, keeping them warm, dry and hydrated.
- Semi-feral kittens that can be tamed down offer additional challenges as their behavior is also a challenge. We will give you tips on how to socialize these kittens and make them into adoptable animals.
- Some kittens die for no apparent reason despite our efforts. This is a sad fact of rescue. These cats are compromised; we do not know their history. We do the best we can. We need to acknowledge our losses and celebrate our successes.

### **Top Ten Tips for Foster Parents**

1. Cats will be assigned to you by a Town Cats' staff person based on your request, capacity, and experience.
2. Always get pre-authorization before going to the vet and always use a vet from our list of veterinary partners. These veterinarians generously give us a rescue discount on services.
3. Check in regularly with the Foster and Adoption Coordinator with updates and progress reports. Always notify the Foster and Adoption Coordinator of any changes with your foster cat.
4. Ask for advice if your cat/kitten has stopped eating, drinking, playing.
5. Check your sick cat/kitten for hydration - they should be drinking water, using the litter box, have loose elastic skin tone, and a moist mouth.
6. Kittens crash fast; ask early if their behavior changes, if they become listless, sleep all the time or have a fever.
7. Never use clumping litter for kittens under six months of age.
8. Wash your hands and change your shirt after handling sick animals to prevent spread of illness. Keep their bedding laundered.
9. Never let your cat outside; guard against escapes.
10. Adoption paperwork must be completed before a cat may go home with an adopter. Never give a cat to an adopter before spay/neuter surgery has been done.

### **What we expect from Foster Parents**

- We need to be able to reach you! Foster parents need to fill out an application so that we can register your contact information in our database, PetPoint. If you move or change your telephone number or email address, please let us know.
- If you find or know of a cat in need, please contact the Foster and Adoption Coordinator or the Intake and Shelter Coordinator at the Town Cats shelter on San Pedro. Each person must follow the proper steps to bring a cat into the Town Cats' system. Each of us needs to adhere to the intake policy and intake process.
- Intake decisions are NOT made by individual foster volunteers. Any kitten/cat will be considered the full responsibility of the foster person if they did not go through the proper intake procedure.

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- Foster people must sign an agreement to be a foster with Town Cats. The contract states that the cat is the property of Town Cats and that the foster person agrees to foster the cat until the cat can be adopted. If we feel that a foster cat is not receiving proper care, we reserve the right to take the cat back and place the cat with another foster family.
- We promote the spaying/neutering of all companion animals and the TNR of community cats. Foster volunteers must also promote spay and neuter and walk the walk: all the cats inside and outside our homes over 3 months of age should be altered to prevent unwanted births. Please speak up if you need help to accomplish this.
- To ensure proper care of your foster cat, we may need to schedule a home visit.
- Fosters must agree to bring foster cats to scheduled veterinarian appointments and to adoption fairs so that the cats can be shown and adopted. For the health of the cat, it is very important that vaccine schedules be kept.
- Cats being fostered for over one year become owned pets of the foster person. From there if the owner/cat guardian wishes to re-home their cat on their own they can.
- Kittens over 8 weeks of age who are ready for adoption (meaning the kittens have been spayed/neutered and microchipped and vaccines have been started) are required to attend regular pet adoption fairs at least twice a month. In addition cats may be placed into adoption centers inside pet food stores to increase their chances of adoption. It is important that we work together. If the foster person fails to cooperate and be part of the process then the cats become their owned pets.
- The foster volunteer must commit to bringing the cats to the weekend adoption fairs and letting Town Cats adoption counselors make decisions on the adoption. It is important that the foster volunteer write an accurate biography of each cat and help us to understand if cats are a bonded pair or especially good with children or dogs so that we can honor the needs of the cat and make the best adoption match possible. If the foster volunteer does not want the foster cats to attend pet fairs or to stay at the adoption centers or the foster volunteer interferes with the adoption process, then they need to make a choice of adopting the cats or letting Town Cats find another foster home.

### **INTAKE PROCEDURES**

Town Cats' staff will do a behavior and health assessment before deciding to take a cat into the Town Cats' system. We will only accept a cat if we have the space and resources to help.

If you find or know of a cat in need, please contact the Foster and Adoption Coordinator or the Intake and Shelter Coordinator at the Town Cats Shelter. Each person must follow the proper steps to bring a cat into the Town Cats' system.

- All cats and kittens must go through the **Town Cats Shelter on San Pedro first** before becoming Town Cat's animals. This means that all foster people/owners must bring any cats or kittens to the Town Cats Shelter for assessment and intake before the cat/kitten will be considered a Town Cat's cat.
- Intake consists of: behavior assessment, health exam, vaccinations, internal and external

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parasite medications, microchipping (if over 6 weeks of age), FeLV/FIV combo test (if over 6 weeks of age) photograph, weight and health assessment, general information about the animal (sex, age, color, breed), where found/how obtained, name and information about the foster person. All this information will be put into a paper record and also into the computer system (PetPoint) so that the cat/kitten can be tracked by Town Cats.

- **A cat/kitten must go through proper Intake by appointment with an authorized Town Cats' staff member to be considered a Town Cats' cat and get support from Town Cats.**

### Medical Records

Upon completion of the intake process, you will be given a copy of the medical record -- this will include all the vaccinations, parasite control drugs, FeLV/FIV test results, microchip number. The original medical record stays at the main Town Cats Shelter; a copy will go with the cat to adoption fairs and go home with the cat when the cat is adopted. It is very important to track the medical history of each cat and document all conditions found, vaccinations given, treatment done, etc., on the medical record. You should document any personality traits you discover that would help place the cat in the proper home, such as liking the company of other cats (or not), good around children, gets along with dogs, loves constant attention, meows a lot, etc. This can be put into the cat/kitten's record as well. When the cat is ready to be made available for adoption, you will be asked to write a detailed biography outlining personality traits, likes, dislikes, habits, food and litter preferences, etc.

- **Appointments must be made in advance.** To make an appointment, contact the Intake and Shelter Coordinator of the Town Cats Shelter or the Foster and Adoption Coordinator. The vet is at Town Cats on Monday and Thursday afternoons (1:30 pm - 4:30 pm) and Fridays (8 am - 3:30 pm).
- Bring all previous medical records with you to your appointment.
- On weekend afternoons we often hold a foster clinic for FVRCP vaccines and for medicines for external/internal parasite control. This is often held at Pet Food Express, 1152 Blossom Hill RD, San Jose on Saturdays and Sundays from 12:30 pm to 4:30 pm to give foster parents more flexibility in getting their kittens vaccinated. The records from these clinics will be transferred to the Town Cats Shelter weekly and the computer and paper records updated. Please call and confirm the scheduling of the foster clinic with the Foster and Adoption Coordinator.

# GETTING YOUR CAT READY FOR ADOPTION

## **Is your foster cat ready for adoption?**

If you are fostering kittens, they must weigh two pounds and have been altered, vaccinated, microchipped, FeLV/FIV tested and treated for internal and external parasites in order to be adopted. Kittens usually reach two pounds between nine and ten weeks of age. They must be completely healthy and have not had any symptoms of any illness for at least one week prior to adoption.

## **Is your foster cat on the Town Cats' web site?**

Once you have spent some time with your cat and have gotten to know his or her personality, please look to see if the cat's picture is posted on our web site. Adults are often put on the web site prior to getting sick and going into foster care. You can check yourself at [www.towncats.org](http://www.towncats.org), or you can check with your Foster and Adoption Coordinator.

If the cat's picture is already on our web site, you should write a new story about the cat's personality (biography of the cat/kitten). A good story makes a big difference in the number of calls the cat gets, so be descriptive. Try to include things like if the cat likes to be petted; held; is a lap cat; purrs easily; is affectionate; is vocal or quiet; active and playful; calm; good litter box manners; uses a scratching post; if it's had any experiences with other cats, dogs, children, strangers, and how the cat reacted to those situations; is the cat outgoing and friendly, or shy. Of course, any other cute things that the cat does or anything you want to point out about the cat's fur or appearance is good as well. It can be as long as you want, but the typical description is a paragraph.

If the cat has some bad habits, this can be discussed during the first phone conversation. The web story should generate interest, not turn people away. We don't want to mislead people; however, we really try to focus on the positive. Please email the story to the web site posting team and it will be posted to the web and on our Facebook page.

If your foster cat's picture is not yet on the web site or you have better or more current photos, then there are several options for getting photos taken and posted. If you have access to a digital camera and would like to take the pictures yourself, you are welcome to do so. Please email them in .jpg format to the web site posting team with your cat's biography.

## **Arranging to have your foster cat at a fair**

Contact the Foster and Adoption Coordinator when your foster cats are ready for public adoption fairs. The Foster and Adoption Coordinator will arrange a location and time for your foster cat to attend the fair. In some cases your foster cat may stay at that location longer than the weekend in order to maximize their visibility and potential for adoption. In other cases you will be asked to pick up your foster cat at the end of the weekend if he or she has not been adopted. These decisions will be made by the Foster and Adoption Coordinator based on the availability of space at any given fair location.

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Thank you for joining the team at Town Cats. Your dedication, compassion, love and hard work make all the difference in the world to these orphaned cats in need. Together we will rescue and save the lives of homeless cats. Thank you for caring about cats in our community.