

What are some of your favorite programs to help cats?

That's the question we asked for this issue's Coffee Break, and you responded with an outpouring of creative—and successful—programs that are making a difference in your communities. We were excited to hear about so many good things happening for kitties! To read more of your responses and answer our next question, go to animalsheltering.org/coffeebreak.



When renovating our shelter we turned a former front-room office with a street view into a cage-free cat room. The room was a community effort. It was designed and built by students of the Montclair University industrial design program with materials donated by local businesses. The train station is around the corner, and it's terrific to watch commuters walk by and then do a double take, stop, and take time out of their busy day to smile at our cats in the window. It really connects our cats and our community and often leads to adoptions.

—Melissa Neiss, shelter operations supervisor/senior animal control officer
Montclair Township Animal Shelter
Montclair, New Jersey

We are proud of our Cat Castle that allows our cats and kitties to be in a room just for them with access to a screened porch for fresh air. There are rockers for people to sit with the felines. A local artist donated her time to hand paint the rooms. The room was built with a generous donation and is a big hit with the felines and the public.

—Bruce Fishalow, executive director
Humane Society of Marion County
Ocala, Florida

Good Mews Animal Foundation offers a program that allows experienced volunteers to work one-on-one with cats that need special attention or socialization. Kitty Buddies commit to spend at least 30 minutes every week with each cat they choose to buddy. While some KB cats just need extra attention, most need help to overcome trauma, neglect, or abuse. Kitty Buddies work with the cats on a long-term basis to help them become more social and adoptable. It's more than just petting and playing; most of the KB cats require intensive work to overcome fear or aggression. We observe each cat's behavior, determine what the cat needs, and then help the cat meet those goals. We record our progress and perform periodic evaluations; our observations are available to the adoption counselors. Kitty Buddies even socialized three feral cats; two have already been adopted. Such results prove the effectiveness of our program.

—Joyce Fetterman, Kitty Buddy coordinator
Good Mews Animal Foundation
Marietta, Georgia

I knew about Operation Catnip (OC) long before I moved to Florida. [The nonprofit organization has offered free spay/neuter surgeries and vaccines for unowned, free-roaming community cats in Alachua County since 1998. It's a cooperative effort among Alachua County Animal Services, the University of Florida College of Veterinary Medicine, and local rescue groups.] Its reputation was impressive—250 cats sterilized in a single day! This, I had to see. After witnessing all of the volunteers in action one Sunday, I vowed to return as a surgeon, to do my part to help the community cats of Alachua County. Having been a participant for the past two years, I still look forward to the Operation Catnip Sundays. The satisfaction of walking out into the hallway at the conclusion of surgery, and seeing the hundreds of kitties recovering in their humane traps, is hard to beat. Thank you, OC, for letting me be a part of this great team effort!

—Sarah Kirk, veterinarian
Operation Catnip
Gainesville, Florida

Our most utilized cat-related program is Operation FFAT Cat (Feral Feeding Assistance Team). This is a comprehensive program that uses a team-based community approach to manage our local feral populations. Through our organization, the colony manager applies to become part of the team. The application includes the location of the colony and descriptions, including spay/neuter status, of all the cats in the colony. We then do a colony inspection to determine the needs. Then the team gets to work. Local veterinarians perform low-cost spay and neuter surgeries subsidized by us. Local builders provide shelters. As soon as the colony can be described as managed, more than 80 percent altered, and having sufficient shelter, our organization provides half of the necessary food to the caretaker. The food is provided to us by local team member merchants at a significant discount. In the six months since the program was established, we now provide food for more than 300 altered cats daily!

—*Gillian Wood Pultz, executive director
North Fork Animal Welfare League Inc.
Southold, New York*

We do cat adoption promotions to inspire the public to adopt and educate them on cats' needs in the home. We're getting ready for St. Patrick's Day, and we do Cinco De Meow, Feline Independence Day, etc. Adopters get discounted adoption rates, go home with cat care info, handmade cat toys and treats, plus information about our free cat-training classes and behavioral support line. For St. Patrick's Day, all their goodies are placed in a yellow litter pan, and they get a free "Pot 'O Gold," while Cinco De Meow's adoption fees are \$5 for adult cats and \$55 for kittens, plus adopters receive a free catnip taco. The holiday themes allow the shelter to also decorate, giving the public a new impression of the "gloomy, dark" animal shelter and cheering up our staff and volunteers through a festive environment!

—*Sam Lenser, cat behavior department
TAILS Humane Society
DeKalb, Illinois*

We started the Smarty Cats reading program. Kids can come out and pick a cat or cats that they would like to read to. We have a room with a couch and a bookcase full of books and of course a litter pan. Kids pick a book and read to the cat. Great opportunity to get to know the cat, practice reading, and keep all the cats social. This is something a person of any age can do. Works well for people who live in an apartment and can't have a pet of their own.

—*Ann Sanders, director
Humane Society of Saline County
Bauxite, Arkansas*

While it is better than being out on the streets, shelter life is not every cat's cup of tea. It can be very stressful with all the noise and activity and all the other cats. As a volunteer, I started a program called Cat Whisperers, which pairs experienced cat socializers/volunteers up with cats who are having trouble settling in or who have other issues such as shyness, short petting tolerance, or depression. The Cat Whisperers commit to working one-on-one with a cat for a minimum of a half hour two days per week (some even come in more often). It gives the cat a sense of security and someone stable in their current transitional life. Feedback from the Cat Whisperers also helps staff understand and address the cats' individual needs.

—*Linda Bailey, volunteer
Mary S. Roberts Pet Adoption Center
Riverside, California*

We partner with the St. Louis Blues hockey team to help promote our animals. David's Dogs started with Blues player David Backes. We then started Kelly's Kats with his wife. Each month we choose three of each, and they come out to have their pictures taken with the animals. The photos are then posted on the St. Louis Blues website and our website, along with other places. We also have a kitty stroller that we bring to events with an adoptable cat.

—*Kim Brown, executive director
St. Charles Humane Society
St. Charles, Missouri*

Congratulations to Kim Brown, whose submission was selected in a random drawing from those published in this issue. Her organization, the St. Charles Humane Society in Missouri, will receive a free coffee break: a \$50 gift certificate to a local coffee shop. "Bone" appétit!

Check out the latest Coffee Break question and submit your responses (150 words or less) at animalsheltering.org/coffeebreak or send them to Editor, Animal Sheltering/HSUS, 2100 L St. NW, Washington, D.C. 20037. **Your answer may be printed in a future issue of Animal Sheltering.** If your response is chosen for publication, you will be entered into a drawing to win a **free coffee break (valued at \$50)** for your organization. Responses may be edited for length or clarity; no donation or purchase is necessary to win. See animalsheltering.org for contest rules, or send an email or letter to the above addresses to request a printed copy.