



Vol. 15, Issue 3 / Fall 2020



Our Companions

Animal Rescue & Sanctuary

Knocking Down Barriers

Understanding the Challenges
of Pet Ownership

PLUS

- | Preventing Separation Anxiety
- | The Dangers of Retractable Leashes
- | Community Cats Need Your Help

Something to Chew On

Dear Friends,

When the pandemic struck in March and the economy immediately collapsed, an odd feeling of familiarity descended upon us at Our Companions. The nature of the looming recession was very different from what had occurred in 2008-2009, and obviously we didn't have a pandemic to contend with back then, but there were many similarities in terms of the outcome – a rise in poverty, homelessness (people and pets), and suffering.

In many ways, 2013 was the year we came into our own as an organization. We had just completed the first rescue cottage at our Sanctuary (in late 2012) and we moved into the Valerie Friedman Program Center in Manchester. Having physical places to house animals, collaborate with our clients, and conduct our day-to-day business was a game-changer and transformed our ability to deliver our programs and services.

In hindsight, however, it really was the Great Recession a few years earlier that set us on a course that very much defines who we are today. It is because of those formative experiences that we are uniquely prepared to meet the substantial needs of the community during this extraordinary time.

Back in 2009, we saw an immediate upsurge of people seeking assistance with their animal-related challenges. Whether it was community members suddenly unable to afford veterinary care or behavioral training classes, or families losing their homes, it became clear that what was happening was going to have a devastating impact in the lives of people and pets alike.

Sincerely,



SUSAN B. LINKER
Chief Executive
Officer and Founder



MARIA DAS NEVES
Board Chair

Operating out of “OC World Headquarters” (a basement), we established an array of programs that are even more vital today. In fact, we now receive over 5,000 calls a year on our Animal Helpline from members of the community seeking assistance with their animal-related challenges.

One of the first things we learned was that by simply offering coaching, support programs, resources, and even just a little empathy, we could prevent pets from becoming homeless. Perhaps most critically, we learned that providing affordable veterinary support for pet owners in financial need was instrumental in keeping families together and ultimately saving lives.

Our organization's guiding principle is to do the right thing for animals. We believe that pet owners also aspire to do the right thing for their animals. In difficult times, this isn't always easy. During periods of economic hardship and uncertainty, people are forced to make harrowing choices. Recognizing this reality, we are resolute in our commitment to providing people and pets the help they need.

With that in mind, we wanted to take this opportunity to thank you so much for your ongoing support. We wouldn't be able to help those in need during this unprecedented moment in history without you. We hope you are safe and healthy and look forward to seeing you (perhaps even in person) sometime soon.

About Our Companions Magazine

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Knocking Down Barriers

Understanding the Challenges of Pet Ownership in Underserved Communities

BY LINDSEY PELLINO

In the current coronavirus pandemic, income inequality has grown exponentially. The United States is facing a wave of homelessness and economic turmoil unlike anything we've seen since the Great Depression. As we all know, economic disparity, however, has always existed – and as the gulf widens, it's necessary for all industries (animal welfare included) to examine how poverty and discrimination impact the people we serve. It's a significant structural problem and it is incumbent upon us to make changes where we can, and address injustices as we see them, in order to foster a more equitable society for all.

HOW POVERTY IMPACTS PET OWNERS

Interestingly, most poor and working-class pet owners don't get their animals from shelters, pounds, or sanctuaries. A study by the Humane Society of the United States shows that only 3% of pets in underserved communities come from rescues. Where are these pets coming from? As the report points out, "The majority of people are taking in pets from neighbors in need or caring for those [pets] without homes, showing that many [of these people] are natural rescuers and care deeply about pets in their community."

Some may think that people of lower economic means shouldn't have a pet if they cannot afford the cost of pet ownership. However, it's important to keep in mind that many in these communities are already involved in animal rescue in its truest sense. Rather than formally adopting from shelters, they open their homes to stray and abandoned pets. They are trying to do the right thing by these animals, despite facing economic hardship themselves.

While it's true that anyone can experience poverty – whether due to an unexpected medical emergency, natural disaster, or job loss, certain social



groups experience poverty at rates higher than the general population. These include people with disabilities, women, African Americans, Native Americans, non-citizen immigrants, and Latinos. The reasons why certain groups face more institutional barriers than others are far beyond the scope of this article. Suffice it to say that with economic hurdles in place for these groups, class divides perpetuate themselves when not everyone has the same access to resources. Let's examine how this impacts pet owners specifically.

Perhaps the most obvious hurdle is the cost of care for pets. As we all know, pet ownership can be quite expensive. Costs include food, litter for cats, bedding for small animals, routine vet care, unexpected vet care, dog training, collars, leashes, licensing fees, landlord-imposed pet fees, medications, etc. When people are struggling, non-essential costs must be re-examined, and unfortunately, pets often fall into this category. If a pet unexpectedly requires emergency care, pet owners with limited resources suddenly face the difficult choice of seeking care for their animal or providing for their family's most essential needs such as food, rent, and healthcare.

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Another huge barrier for pet owners, both current and future, is housing. Public housing like Section 8 may or may not allow pets, at the individual landlord's discretion. This makes finding affordable housing even more difficult for pet owners, especially if their circumstances change and they need to move. Furthermore, if someone falls on hard times and gets evicted from their home, caring for their pets can become impossible. If someone must go stay on a friend's couch and that friend already has a pet, or their landlord doesn't allow animals, then the pet of the displaced person can get left behind. Right now, with fewer jobs available and rental assistance dwindling, people have very few options when it comes to housing. This problem is magnified many times over, if they have a pet. Following eviction, it can be difficult to find another rental that allows pets, and those that do often charge a prohibitive pet fee.

There are other less obvious factors that make caring for pets difficult. Issues of transportation are common. Many people don't have their own vehicles and rely on public transportation, which typically does not allow pets. In many poorer communities, grocery stores and pet supply stores are less common.

The challenges associated with human healthcare also contribute to poverty and the inability to care for a pet. With the high cost of health insurance and many people opting to go without, medical emergencies can quickly drain a family's finances. Healthcare costs are the number one cause of personal bankruptcy in the U.S., and more than 137 million Americans have medical debt. If someone has to be hospitalized for a long period of time, or must enter into an assisted living facility, their

pet's care will fall to a family member or friend. If there is no one to take care of the pet, sadly, the animal is usually sent to a shelter. Poverty, housing, healthcare, and many other factors complicate pet ownership for those who are struggling.

UNINTENDED OR SUBCONSCIOUS BIAS IN ANIMAL WELFARE

Like all industries, the animal welfare world is not immune to bias, particularly within the application and adoption processes. Persons screening adoption applications may inadvertently make a judgment based on an applicant's cultural name, neighborhood, dwelling type, or occupation, which may influence the decision to approve or deny an application. Without being aware of our own biases, we can perpetuate these discriminatory practices without realizing it. Adoption processes vary among organizations, and some applications contain questions that may be perceived as a method of weeding out "undesirable" adopters. Although these questions actually may be intended to help find the right home for a certain animal and their unique medical or behavioral needs, potential adopters who aren't used to working with rescue organizations might be turned off or feel threatened by the types of questions asked.

Furthermore, there is a lack of diversity in the animal welfare world, which can lead to blind spots and limited perspectives; the animal welfare field itself is dominated by women, particularly white women. This is also true for the non-profit sector in general. Pet owners or potential adopters seeking assistance from an animal rescue organization may be wary of working with a group whose composition does not at least partially reflect the makeup of their own community.

It's important that we also consider that biases occur even before the application and adoption process begins, specifically where adoptable pets come from in the first place. In New England especially, animal welfare has seen a shift in recent years. The success of spay/neuter programs has led to shortages of puppies, kittens and what are usually considered "highly adoptable" pets. As a result, many organizations transport animals from regions that have an overabundance of adoptable pets (usually the southern states), to the northern states; and animals from poorer communities are being adopted out to wealthier communities.

While transports can be a lifeline for overburdened shelters, they can be a barrier to access for working class people who would love and care for a pet just as a more affluent pet guardian would. Relocating animals away from work-



ing-class adopters to wealthier adopters doesn't fix the structural problems within a community. In a New York Times article entitled, "Everyone Wants a Rescue Dog. Not Everyone Can Have One," journalist Kate Murphy highlights the problems associated with transport, including putting animals through the stress of interstate travel when potential adopters exist right in their own community. We must find a balance between assisting areas with overrun homeless pet populations and making sure that the operation isn't putting up even more barriers for adoption in these underserved communities.

WHAT NOW?

There is so much that we as animal welfare workers and the community at large can do for financially vulnerable pet owners. First, we can make sure they are supported so they don't ever have to give up their pets due to a lack of resources. At Our Companions, for instance, we provide veterinary support programs, including Pop-Up Wellness Clinics and affordable dog training, to help as many pets as possible. We also provide other support programs, such as those offered through our Animal Helpline, which fields more than 5,000 calls each year, providing advice, resources, and animal care services to people who need them.

Other cost-saving initiatives that animal welfare organizations can offer include reduced adoption fees, pet food banks, partnering with veterinarians to reduce pet care costs, and advocating for pet-friendly legislation. Affording seemingly incidental costs such as licensing fees, annual exams, and apartment-related pet fees can be problematic for those with limited resources. By advocating for systemic change, organizations can support current pet owners and improve the societal situation for pet owners in the future. Significantly reducing, if not eliminating, the barriers to adoption will allow for more pets to find their forever homes – and stay there.

Finally, what if, instead of removing animals from a community, organizations were given resources to help support pet owners within vulnerable communities? What changes might we make in these communities to prevent an overabundance of pets in the first place? What if we focused more on preserving a pet's current home, rather than their removal from the people who love them but who may be struggling?

At Our Companions, like many institutions in our country during this reflective time, we are looking closely at our policies and programs, to identify opportunities for expanding the reach of our services as well as the diversity of those involved in our organization.



Pictured here are some friends who received care at a recent Our Companions pop-up clinic.

Everyone deserves the opportunity to adequately provide for their family and pets, and the joys of pet ownership transcend economic differences. Regardless of socioeconomic status, we all love our animals and want to do right by them. When organizations make the conscious choice to examine their practices, address biases, and extend compassion to all pet owners, we can go a long way toward correcting injustices. A better world for pets and their families is possible, if we make the effort to create one.



The Votes Are In On Retractable Leashes

BY LYN T. GARSON, CVT, CCRP

Take a poll. Ask veterinary professionals, behavioral trainers, groomers and doggie day care providers about their most hated pet product and you will probably receive the same answer from everyone – the retractable leash.

Sure, retractable leashes are convenient, sporty, and allow a dog some extra walking freedom. Many models even come with on-board accessories such as flashlights and bone-shaped poop bag holders. But the fact is that these leashes are extremely dangerous.

Common Injuries to Dogs and Humans

While the retractable leash does allow a larger area and distance for dogs to roam and sniff, it also opens up a world of increased risk. Because the cords on these leashes roll out at up to thirty feet in length, it's much more difficult to control a dog's sudden movements. While attached to the wandering end of a retractable leash, dogs have been known to easily dart into the street and get hit by a car. They can bolt after a

squirrel, cat or another dog. Pet owners in a panic might grab the leash cord or attempt to engage the locking button on the handle to stop the dog but these actions can happen so abruptly that the dog gets jolted back by their collar, causing possible damage to their trachea, neck, or spine. Also, without warning, the cords can suddenly snap off the reel mechanism inside the plastic handle while in use with any size dog, but especially by the forceful pull of larger animals. The dog is then free to run unprotected, meanwhile the owner may be smacked in the face by the recoiled leash handle.

While dogs are busy exploring their surroundings, the leash cord might snag on obstacles such as trees, bushes and other objects.

Here's another situation that happens more often than pet owners imagine. While fumbling with car keys, mail, or distracted by a smartphone in hand, the bulky plastic handle of the retractable leash is accidentally dropped on a dog's body, or worse, their head. Sadly, a friend's small dog was once struck on the head by a falling leash handle and suffered life-long seizure episodes as a result.

Head injuries are just one of the many problems caused by these leashes. Lacerations, bruises, rope-type burns, and fractures are commonly seen injuries in both dogs and humans. There are even reports of finger amputations as a result of grabbing or being entangled by the thin cord. Retractable leashes now come with a warning stamped on them, and some manufacturers include a guidebook describing not only proper use but potential hazards.

Other dangerous scenarios are associated with the use of retractable leashes. While dogs are busy exploring their surroundings, the leash cord might snag on obstacles such as trees, bushes and other objects. The cord can also be caught around their neck, causing strangulation. When a dog on a retractable leash encounters another dog to play with, their leash cords can easily become wrapped around their bodies or limbs increasing the chance of various types of injuries to themselves and their owners. If either dog is aggressive, an uncontrolled greeting can turn into a vicious attack that is difficult to prevent or break up without the strength and reliability of a solid leash.

As dogs learn to associate pulling on the leash cord with independence, this additional perceived freedom becomes a rewarded behavior, so dogs continue to pull and ignore training commands. When a dog tugs the cord hard or unexpectedly, the heavy cumbersome handle can be yanked out of a pet owner's hand allowing the dog the ultimate escape – to run loose and into potential trouble. The dog might be so terrified by the sound of the plastic handle banging against the ground as it trails behind him that he panics and runs farther away from his owner. This situation not only is hazardous but also creates an associated fear of leash walking.



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Safe Leash Walking

The whole purpose of using a leash is for safe and controlled walking for both you and your dog. While it's fine to allow some slack for sniffing and exploring, the longer a leash extends out, the less control you have, which minimizes the ability to manage potential problems. The best method of safe leash walking is using a fixed-length four to six-foot flat standard lead, with your dog either by your side or nearby obeying your commands.

Take the time and patience required to train your dog not to pull by offering high value treats while practicing walking nicely beside you. Small pieces of raw hot dogs, tiny meatballs, or bits of string cheese all make tasty treats for learning proper leash manners. Combining a harness with the leash is a great way to protect your pet from accidentally slipping out of a collar or damaging their neck or trachea. Walking with your dog safely by your side on a sturdy leash makes for much more relaxing and enjoyable outings together.

Now take another poll. Ask your pet professionals which type of leash material they like best. You may be surprised by their answer – good quality leather. The reasons are many. These leashes are strong, more comfortable to hold, less slippery in wet weather, and easier to grip. Cowhide leather leashes are more durable than nylon, will last many years with basic care, and become more supple over time. They are my personal favorite, and the one I recommend to pet owners consistently. The leash I still use today is the same six-foot leather lead I purchased when training my newly adopted three-year-old shepherd beagle mix more than 30 years ago. And every day when I clip the lead on my current dog's harness, I reminisce about my three dogs who safely used this leash before him.

NO RETRACTABLE LEASHES, PLEASE.

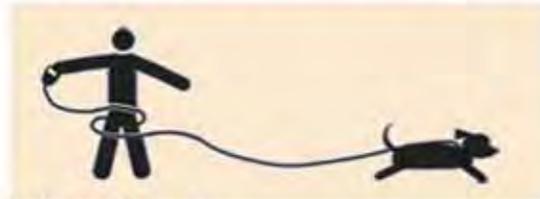


For the safety of your dog, and everyone else's.

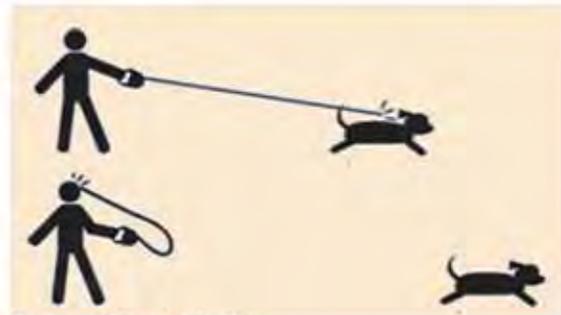
Some not-so-fun side effects of retractable leashes (illustrations taken from the Flexi leash website)



Finger amputations and fractures (OMD)



Cuts and burns



Eye and face injuries



Injuries to bystanders



Falls





IT'S A LOT EASIER THAN YOU MIGHT THINK

When people think of animal rescue, they most often assume it pertains to adoptions, and usually it does; but here in Connecticut, there are hundreds of thousands of free-roaming cats who also need help. Many of these animals may never be adoptable in the traditional sense, but they appreciate having a warm, dry place to live, nutritious food, and immunizations to keep them healthy.

These "Community Cats," also known as feral cats, are unowned and live outdoors. They often are not socialized to people but can live healthy lives with their feline families in outdoor cat colonies once they have been neutered, vaccinated and are provided daily caregiving.

Our Companions offers a Trap Training Program to provide our clients with the training, equipment, and volunteer support to Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR) the cats in their care. We also provide warm cat shelters, food donations and access to veterinary services.

Caroline Gaetano, Our Companions' Director of Community Programs, spends a good portion of her typical workday speak-



ing with individuals who call Our Companions seeking help with outdoor cats. "If there is one message I wish everyone could get, it's how important being proactive is in preventing unnecessary suffering."

It's human nature to put off dealing with situations that seem unpleasant or uncertain. Many people don't know what to do or what help is available or appropriate for a situation involving outdoor cats. This is understandable, however you're not alone – we are here to help.



Here is the typical scenario common to nearly every colony that comprises the 100,000+ community cats who live outside each day in our state:

Initially, someone discovers a cat hanging around their home or workplace and it seems the animal is homeless or has been abandoned. Most people care about cats and don't want to see them suffer or go hungry, so they do what is natural to help them: they feed them. Days, weeks, months, and sometimes years pass, and the next thing you know, there are 20 or 50 cats hanging around. This is when getting help becomes a lot more complicated.

"We often get calls after people have been feeding cats for many weeks or months," explains Caroline. "The reason they decide to call for help is that the situation has become urgent or out of

control. Either multiple litters have been born and they are looking for help with the kittens or one or more of the cats has become injured or sick.”

When Our Companions receives a call at this stage, it is much more complex and much more difficult for us to assist with than if there were just one or two cats. While it’s never too late for us to intervene, there’s no question that proactive measures work best to prevent unnecessary suffering.

Many people don’t know that the mortality rate for outdoor kittens is very high – often around 75%. This means that three out of four kittens will not survive; and cats can have up to three litters each year. The number of vulnerable kittens who perish within the first few weeks of life outdoors is heartbreaking.

The endless cycle of pregnancies takes a tremendous toll on female feral cats. For their part, male cats actively roam and get into fights with other cats, which leads to injury as well as the spread of disease, not to mention the production of many, many offspring.

In the immortal words of Bob Barker, animal welfare advocate and emcee of *The Price is Right*, "The answer to the cat overpopulation problem is simple: spay and neuter," and TNR accomplishes this very effectively.

“There is help out there. Most people don’t know that – or they imagine it may be expensive or that they will have to

handle the cats – or in other cases they don’t have confidence in their ability to do what needs to be done. Rest assured, the programs at Our Companions provide a solution and solid options to address all the barriers you may think exist," says Caroline.

“Our goal in emphasizing the importance of being proactive is for you to call us when that first cat shows up – please don’t wait. It may just be a neighbor’s cat who is out on an adventure – or it may be a stray or feral cat that truly needs help. We will help you sort out the situation and get you the help you need.”

So, the next time you see what seems to be a stray cat, don’t just look the other way. The problem is not going to go away – it’s only going to get worse. But it doesn’t have to. You can make a difference and we can help. It all starts with a phone call to Our Companions’ Helpline at 860-242-9999. There is no charge for this service.

On behalf of all the community cats we serve, now and in the future, thank you for making a difference for them – and for our communities.

To learn more about our Community Cats Programs, call (860) 242-9999 or email us at HelpLine@OurCompanions.org





We at Our Companions have always been successful at anticipating and adapting nimbly to the shifting trends in animal welfare. Our innovative home-like Sanctuary, for example – the only one of its kind in New England – is a place where staff and volunteers are continually seeking new and creative ways to care for the area's most vulnerable animals.

The shelter-in-place restrictions that were imposed as a result of COVID-19 presented us with unanticipated challenges. We had to figure out how to continue providing our essential services while ensuring the safety and wellbeing of our staff and volunteers. We have been continually re-evaluating operations, as well as researching and complying with state standards, all the while implementing every possible protection.

During normal conditions, Our Companions enjoys the dedicated support of more than 200 volunteers at the Sanctuary, providing over 250 service hours each week. The absence of these volunteers was a hard hit to our organization because it required us to use paid workers to carry out this essential work.

As you may have read in local and national news, one positive side effect of the pandemic has been the dramatic surge in pet adoptions. Our application submissions nearly tripled during the first two months of quarantine. When faced with home isolation, many individuals and families sought the companionship of an animal.

"During the spring and summer we were able to Trap/Neuter/Return (TNR) twice the number of cats as during the same time last year."

We made a few adjustments in order to continue conducting cat adoptions at our Sanctuary, including requiring face masks and handwashing. Fortunately, many cats had their own room, and applicants were able to enter the room while our adoption team stayed out in the hall and were still able to communicate through the door. Cleaning and disinfecting the cottages throughout the day was an absolute priority.

We were able to find wonderful homes for many of our long-term Sanctuary cats. Bonkers had been with us for three years until finally finding his perfect match. Since many of our Sanctuary cats were adopted, we invited several of the cats in our Rehoming Program to the Sanctuary. Since these cats had applicants already interested, their "meet and greets" were scheduled a short time after their arrival and they were adopted within weeks.

Since our dog adoption process includes a home visit component, we needed to delay reopening our dog adoption program until the stay-at-home order was lifted. As the spring progressed and it became safe to do so, we resumed our dog adoptions. Meetings were held outdoors, and home visits were just walk-throughs, quickly returning outside, to maintain social distancing. The luck continued and we found perfect homes for many of our canine charges. While our adoption process does have important new safety aspects, our quest continues: finding loving homes for our very special animals.

In addition to making changes in our Sanctuary operations and adoption programs, we had to adjust our TNR (Trap/Neuter/Return) program for Community Cats. Spring and summer are typically our busiest months for Trap/Neuter/Return efforts. High-volume spay-neuter clinics closed for several months and many of our regular vets limited their appointments to emergencies only. As a result, we had to quickly establish new veterinary partners to provide these critical TNR services. We also extended our financial support so that clients could have the surgeries done by their own veterinarians, but at a similarly reduced cost.

During the stay-at-home order, our dog behavior program shifted to



Outdoors is MUCH more fun than indoors!



Tripp and Mary doing a little training in the great outdoors, Ashford, CT

virtual assistance. Now that the state has reopened, we have brought back our dog training classes. We are holding them outside when possible, or in our training room at the Valerie Friedman Program Center, adhering to all safety precautions. Thankfully, the 6,000 square-foot facility is spacious enough for us to hold classes masked-up and at a safe social distance.

Programs that help keep families and their pets together are the foundation of Our Companions. We recognized early in the pandemic that families would struggle to provide for their pets, and this prompted us to establish our eGift Card Program. Donated Petco eGift cards are used to purchase food that is delivered directly to Manchester Social Services and then is distributed to families in need. Ed Paquette, Supervisor of Manchester Senior, Adult & Family Services said, “This makes a huge difference, as we were out of cat food before these orders started arriving. Many of our older and disabled adults are struggling to get their own food delivered and so this has been very helpful.”

As we head into the autumn months, we face even more uncertainty. However, thanks to our creative, resilient staff, our stalwart volunteers and the dedicated support of the community, we are confident that we will not only continue these programs but will find even more ways to be of service to the people and pets who need us most.



Our Companions Sanctuary at sunset, Ashford, CT

DONOR FEATURE

All You Need Is Love

DONORS BRADLEY AND KATHY HOFFMAN HAVE THE RIGHT IDEA

BY JENNIFER BARROWS

Bradley and Kathy Hoffman have a lot of love in their lives; love for each other, love for their family and love for their animals. And not necessarily in that order. That's just how much they love animals – and that sentiment is shared by many in their extended family including Brad's 92-year old mother.

They even named their newest family member, a three-month-old Golden Doodle, "Wilson Love Hoffman." And at this strange and difficult time of pandemic pandemonium and world-wide uncertainty, love is exactly what we all need, and Wilson is bringing it to the Hoffmans in spades.

Kathy and Brad have been steadfast supporters of Our Companions since 2012. "Many times, involvement in an organization starts with a personal relationship," says Brad. "I first heard about Our Companions through Susan Linker's husband, Mitch, who I knew from our mutual work with another organization. Through our conversations I learned more about Our Companions, and Kathy and I started thinking about getting involved." We met Susan and learned more about it. Choosing to become involved in Our Companions was easy based on the organization's mission statement and Kathy's and my longtime history with animals, both before we were together and since we've been together."

A couple of years later, in 2014, Kathy visited the Sanctuary in Ashford. "Susan showed me around. I went to see the first rescue cottage and I absolutely fell in love with it," recalls

Kathy. "I almost came home with a cat that day – and I'm not even a cat person! This cat had no hind legs, but they had made him a little cart with wheels to get around. If I wasn't allergic, we would have had a cat! Animals who had behavior or aggression challenges were being trained and socialized. I was so impressed with how much love and attention they got, and inspired by how the animals bonded with each other, as well as with their caretakers. Also, I was very taken with the home setting, which had a kitchen, living room and bedroom. It just makes sense to train animals in that kind of environment. I was totally impressed by what they were doing, and they only had one rescue cottage at that point."

Kathy says she still occasionally asks about the cat she fell in love with that day. "I just felt so connected to him. He was such a happy cat despite his challenges."

"I didn't fully realize the life-saving work they did at the Sanctuary," Brad says. "We're talking about animals who are likely to be put down – that's the kindest way I can put it. These workers save their lives, they keep them going until they can find them a home. The other part is, sometimes they don't find a home for an animal, so the Sanctuary becomes their permanent home. The reality is, they could have 150 houses and it wouldn't be enough. There's no end to it, so they're just fighting that numbers game. That was the biggest thing for me, gaining that awareness of how they are really saving lives every day."

"This is above and beyond rescue," says Kathy, "because these are often initially traumatized and reactive animals who may have been abused or abandoned. The staff and volunteers work not only with the animals but with the families, to make sure a potential adoptive home is the right fit. It surprises me just how many animals they are able to turn around. They don't rush them through their rehabilitation, they keep them as long as they need to."

Kathy and Brad previously had two beloved Golden Doodles, sadly who passed just in the last couple of years. They were named Oscar Funkhouser (inspired by the comedy series, *Curb Your Enthusiasm*) and Macallan Morrison (inspired by the single-malt scotch, and Jim Morrison, lead singer of *The Doors*). Brad recalls many nights, the four of them on their king-size bed. "I wouldn't give the dogs permission to jump up, so they'd sort of circle the bed and wait until I fell asleep and then they'd jump up on Kathy's side. Kathy and the dogs



had a deal. I'd wake up in the morning and Kathy and the dogs would be completely spread out on the bed – with three acres each; and I was clinging to the edge on my 1/8th of an acre!”

“It was tough losing them,” says Kathy. “When we lost the second one, Oscar, last November, I said ‘that’s it for dogs,’ – my heart was just destroyed. But then with the pandemic really shutting down life and travel as we know it and being quarantined for months, I realized that my life is not whole without that companion with me. They used to come to work with us at the dealership (Hoffman Auto Group). Our customers and employees loved them. Our employees would take them for walks when they were having a stressful day. With this quarantine, life is going to change for a while; we realized it’s the perfect opportunity to train and acclimate a new puppy to our family, our home life, and all the other dogs in our extended family.”

The Hoffmans will be adding yet again to their immediate family – hopefully next spring – this time around, it will be a Sheepadoodle. Many members of the extended Hoffman family have Golden Doodles, all from the same breeder.

“The running joke in our family is, I always say, ‘The dogs are first, the grandchildren are second, the kids are third, The Lord is fourth, and I’m fifth,’” says Brad.

The Hoffmans have five children. “The animals are at the top of our list. Though our granddaughter Sophie (2 ½ years old) might have moved up to first place,” jokes Brad. “She was wonderful with our old dog Oscar, who was left after Mac died. It was incredible how protective Oscar was of Sophie.”

Kathy agrees. “He wouldn’t leave her side. When we lost Mac, who passed away first, we sort of lost both dogs, because Oscar really wanted to be part of a pack. He missed having his canine companion, so he adopted Sophie and it was obvious he was happier when he was with her. He would sit next to her highchair, lie under her crib, and sit or curl up with her on the floor. He even enjoyed being dressed up by her with princess crowns and hats. She adored him. So now we’re training Wilson Love to be just as gentle and loving, with the hope that Sophie and he will have that same kind of extra special bond she shared with Oscar.”

The Hoffmans are very outdoorsy and they include their pets in their walking, running, and hiking adventures. “Our intent with this puppy is to try to get him used to going in the kayak so we can take him over to the beach off-season when we’re at the Cape,” says Kathy. “This puppy has no issues with water

– I’ve already given him a couple of showers, both indoors and outdoors.”

Getting back to their involvement with Our Companions, Brad says, “I don’t know anyone who has heard about and been touched by Our Companions who doesn’t become interested. If they can get the touch, it’s an automatic win. Plus, it seems like so many Americans have pets.”

“Especially now that our lives have slowed down,” Kathy adds, “I was hesitant to get another pet, because I didn’t think we had the time to devote to training a new puppy. But we’re home a lot now. More and more people are getting pets because, if they’re doing it the right way, they have more time to acclimate them to their home and family.”

“I think Kathy’s message is really perfect for this article,” says Brad. “Pet ownership is really a win-win right now. Think about it, there really are no sports these days; we don’t go to restaurants like we used to. Having a pet is very grounding for people, enabling them to enjoy life in a different way. It’s win-win, giving and receiving love from a pet.”

“Pets are tremendously grounding,” Kathy agrees. “Now people can include them in new and different kinds of activities. For example, instead of going to the gym, people are going outside more and they’re bringing their dogs with them. No matter where we are – pets are everywhere.”

“In my normal life, I’m working many hours,” says Brad. “I still work a lot of hours, but because I’m working more from home, I can have the dog right on my lap during a Zoom call. I might be dealing with difficult challenges in some of these online meetings, but Wilson’s right there, giving me solace.”

“That is why his middle name is Love,” says Kathy.

“Love is the answer,” says Brad.

“Yes,” agrees Kathy, “Love is the answer.”



Wilson Love



Forever Home Society

BECOME AN ANIMAL BENEFACTOR – JOIN THE FOREVER HOME SOCIETY

Estate planning is for everyone; your name doesn't have to be Vanderbilt or Rockefeller. All it takes is a generous spirit and a desire to make a difference in the lives of homeless pets for years to come. By joining the Forever Home Society, you will be adding your name to a very special group of donors. Bequeathing a monetary gift of any size to Our Companions will help ensure that for generations to come, we can continue to do the right thing for animals, regardless of the challenge or cost. Below, is a current listing of the Forever Home Society members. We hope you will consider adding your name to this list of philanthropic animal lovers.

If you have already included Our Companions in your estate plan, please let us know so we can welcome you as a member of the Forever Home Society. To learn more, please contact Susan Linker at (860) 242-9999, ext. 301 or email SusanL@OurCompanions.org.

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| Mr. Douglas and Mrs. Irma Gregory | Mrs. Penelope Petrone | |

* Deceased

If you have already included Our Companions in your estate plans, please let us know so we can welcome you as a member of the *Forever Home Society*. To learn more, please contact Susan Linker at (860) 242-9999, ext. 301 or email SusanL@OurCompanions.org.

Legal Language and Tax ID If you wish to name Our Companions in your will or estate plans, we should be named as: **Our Companions Domestic Animal Sanctuary, DBA Our Companions Animal Rescue** · Legal Address: P.O. Box 956 Manchester, CT 06045 · Tax ID number: 41-2047734

The Annual Fund Makes Everything We Do Possible!

At Our Companions Animal Rescue, nearly 100% of our funding comes from charitable donations. All of the following critical programs are made possible by your generosity:

- Rescue and rehabilitation services at the Sanctuary
- Adoptions
- Re-homing and pet retention programs
- Community cat initiatives
- Low-cost pop-up veterinary wellness clinics for families in financial need
- Behavioral consultations
- Specialized training classes at the Valerie Friedman Program Center
- Buddy Program for at-risk youth

Now more than ever, in this time of uncertainty and financial hardship, the community is relying on us for help. To ensure we have the resources to continue honoring our promise to always do the right thing for animals in need, we are asking for your help.

Please consider making a generous gift to our Fall Fundraising Drive.

To make your gift, please use the enclosed envelope, visit ourcompanions.org/donate or contact Susan Linker at 860.242.9999 Ext. 301 or susanl@ourcompanions.org.

On behalf of the people and pets of Our Companions, thank you for your kindness.

We are proud and honored to have once again received 4 stars (a score of 99.77 out of 100) from Charity Navigator, the largest and most-utilized evaluator of charities in the United States.



Did you know about the Charitable IRA Rollover?



If you are 70.5 years or older, the Charitable IRA Rollover allows you to make charitable donations directly from your IRA to qualified charities like Our Companions Animal Rescue.

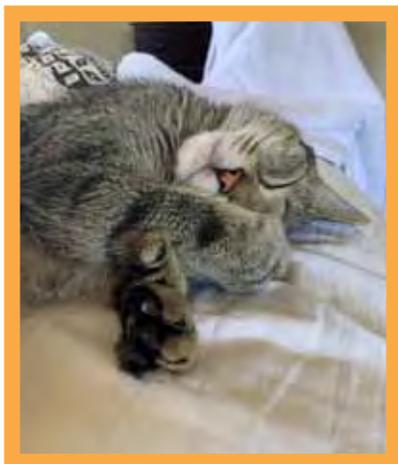
As a result of the March 2020 federal coronavirus response bill, the government has temporarily suspended the required minimum distribution from IRAs. However, you can still donate to Our Companions Animal Rescue through your IRA without having to count the transfer as income for federal or state tax purposes.

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If you have any questions or you would like to learn more about gift planning at Our Companions, please contact us at 860.242.9999 Ext. 301 or SusanL@OurCompanions.org. Thank you for helping us keep our promise to always do the right thing for animals.



Back in March, Connecticut Governor Ned Lamont issued a “Stay Safe, Stay Home” executive order, in an effort to prevent widespread transmission of the coronavirus. For most of us, this new way of living has represented a monumental lifestyle change as we’ve withdrawn from social activities and focused more on our home life. Interestingly, home confinement has engendered a stronger appreciation for personal relationships and a desire to be connected. Animal shelters, sanctuaries and rescue organizations across the country have witnessed a tremendous increase in pet adoptions and foster program participation during this time. Thankfully, Our Companions is no exception. We’d like to share with you some highlights of our most inspiring recent adoptions. In almost every case, perhaps the most compelling aspect is that these animals were long-term guests at the Sanctuary. For whatever reason, they needed extra time, love and attention, but eventually got their second chance at a forever home. We’re happy that they are thriving in their new homes and providing their humans with lots of love at this difficult time.



BONKERS, aka Greyson

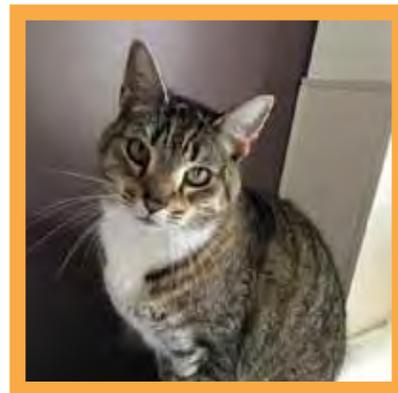
Bonkers had a few behavioral issues; he loved to “nibble” on us – ouch! But with lots of time and attention from volunteers, he made significant progress. His new name is Greyson and he absolutely loves his new home.

Bonkers had been at the Sanctuary since February 2018.

APRIL

April was such a sweetheart who wanted nothing more than a constant lap to sit on! With some minor health issues, it took a while for her to get adopted – but it was worth the wait to find just the right fit.

April arrived at the Sanctuary in March 2019



PIPER

Pretty girl, Piper, was at the Sanctuary way too long – she was such a good kitty who just couldn’t find a match. This was not all that surprising, since during showings she would hide, being shy around new people. Thankfully, a patient adopter visited a couple of times to get to know the “real” Piper and they hit it off!

Piper had been at the Sanctuary since May 2019

HENRI & JINGLES

These two boys did not start out together. Jingles came to us as a stray, and Henri was brought in because he was getting picked on in the home. They became fast friends while sharing a room at the Sanctuary, and the rest is history! They went to a forever home together where they can be pals for life.

Henri and Jingles arrived at the Sanctuary in November 2019





PEGALEO

After his owner had to go into assisted living, sweet old man Pegaleo needed a place where he could be the star of the show in his golden years. Now he's loving life in his new home.

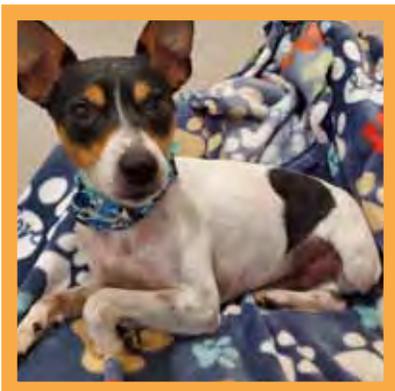
Pagaleo arrived at the Sanctuary in February 2020



DOBBY

As a three-legged pup, Dobby had some mobility issues that took a while for him to get used to. He was treated for heartworm during his time here and had a bit of a setback when he was returned to the Sanctuary after a first adoption attempt that did not work out (due to issues with the other dog in the home). We're thrilled to report that he's finally found his forever home, and it was worth the wait!

Dobby was a guest at our Sanctuary since February 2019



VINNY

Another three-legged pup, Vinny had extreme separation anxiety which made finding the perfect home a bit of a challenge. Thankfully he's found a large, wonderful family with plenty of time and love to share. A perfect fit!

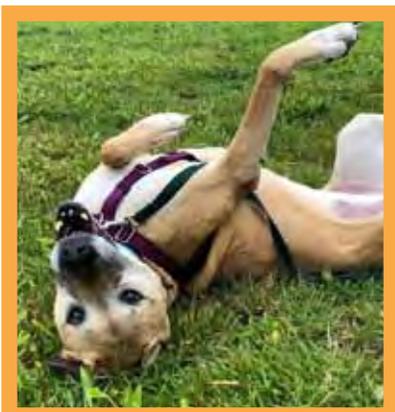
Vinny arrived at the Sanctuary in December 2019



WAFFLES

Little Waffles had some "bathroom-related" problems that required extensive gastrointestinal surgery to reroute his "plumbing." After lots of therapy and healing time at the Sanctuary, he's doing better than ever and has found a forever home!

Waffles had been at the Sanctuary since September 2019



KAHLUA

Having been abandoned, and after several unsuccessful adoption attempts, Kahlua made her way to the Sanctuary with a laundry list of medical issues and a fierce dislike of other dogs. After successful surgery that left her cancer-free, this very special senior gal finally found her forever home too.

Kahlua arrived at the Sanctuary in January 2019





At Our Companions' Sanctuary, all our feline guests have their own patio, which we refer to as a "catio." A catio allows a cat to go outside safely, get some fresh air, nap in the sun and enjoy the natural outdoor environment.

Thanks to the generosity of several donors, last year we were able to install three new fenced-in play yards at the Sanctuary for the dogs. One of them, the Serenity Play Yard, was intended to serve multiple purposes, above and beyond the other yards. Serenity Play Yard has agility equipment for canine confidence-building training, exercise, and off-leash running. The yard also contains physical rehabilitation equipment to help dogs heal after orthopedic surgeries, which is common among the special-needs dogs who are brought to our Sanctuary.

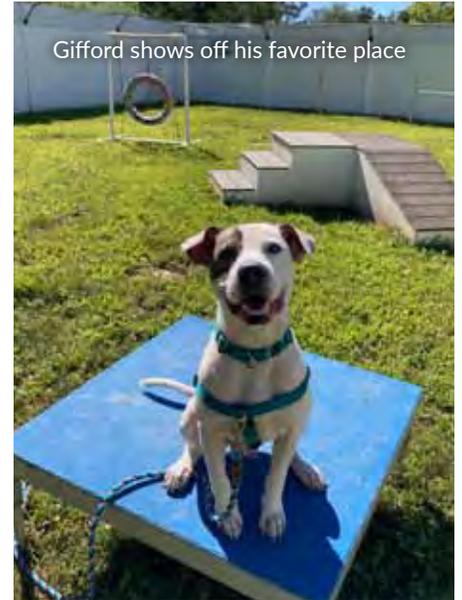
What makes Serenity Play Yard extra special is that it's also now a safe outdoor haven for cats! We installed special feline escape-proof fencing on top of the vinyl fence. For some of our high energy cats at the Sanctuary, although the smaller, individual catios are great, they're not large enough for the cats to really burn off steam. There's nothing like a good grasshopper chasing game to satisfy a high-drive feline! Our adventure-loving but more mellow cats, can just mosey about, sniffing and enjoying some tasty grass snacks in a large, safe space. As you might imagine, cats love (and are great at) navigating the agility equipment. At right are some photos of Serenity Play Yard and a few of the guests enjoying this enriching new Sanctuary feature.



Gator being playful!



Senior kitty Mikey loves the healing sun bath



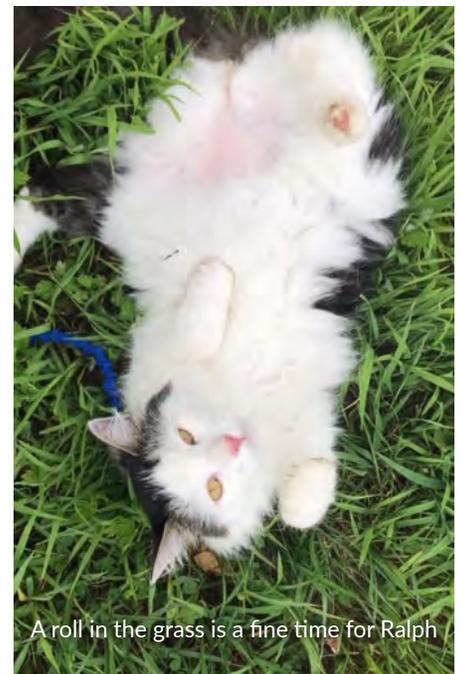
Gifford shows off his favorite place



Ralph enjoys a view of the woods



The tube is the perfect place for some shade



A roll in the grass is a fine time for Ralph





Give a Tripod a Try

Several weeks ago, at the veterinary specialty hospital where I work, a black and white kitten sat among a pile of fleece blankets in his cage awaiting surgery. As we peered at him through a glass wall, the surgical nurse mentioned he was scheduled for a limb amputation. He was an injured stray found by the side of the highway dragging his right front leg. Naturally, I immediately wanted to adopt this little guy; three-legged cats, often called tripods, are my favorite. "You would be number five, Lyn," the nurse giggled, "Four other people already signed up to adopt him."

I was disappointed but relieved to know he would soon be placed into a loving home after surgery, especially considering many feline amputees require minimal to no special treatment. Studies have shown that the degree to which cats adapt after amputation is a function of the age of the cat and whether it is a front or rear limb that is lost. Generally, the younger the cat, the easier it is to acclimate to life on three legs; however even older cats are able to make the adjustment with additional support. Since front legs carry more body weight than hind legs, a front limb amputation introduces a greater mobility challenge, but certainly not an unsurmountable one. Most cats quickly learn to compensate for the missing limb.

The most common reason for amputation in cats is traumatic injury. In some instances, multiple fractures of a bone cannot be repaired and removing the leg may be the only viable option. In older cats, tumors and even severe cases of arthritis can also lead to amputation. Although amputation may seem like a drastic remedy, it is important to remember that removing the limb also eliminates the source of pain and improves quality of life. Cats are not typically affected by phantom limb pain, as humans can be, however, you might notice them twisting their body as if to scratch the missing leg. Strength-building for their core muscles and remaining limbs can be achieved through a structured rehabilitation exercise program that incorporates fun interactive play activities for both you and your cat.

Thanks to online videos of these amazing animals in action, many people are interested in adopting cats with missing limbs. Consider the following facts



Technically Speaking is written by Certified Veterinary Technician, Lyn T. Garson, to address basic information on animal health issues and how they needn't be barriers to adopting a great pet.

that address common concerns before deciding to adopt a tripod kitty, or in the event that your own cat becomes three-legged.

Indoors Only. Three-legged cats run, play, jump and climb just like cats with four legs, but they may be slower to escape predators and avoiding other outdoor hazards, so it's best to keep them inside if unsupervised. Walking with a harness and leash can provide safe excursions outside, and catio enclosures are ideal for protected outdoor entertainment.

Litterbox Adjustments. Large litter boxes with low sides are more accessible, especially when initially acclimating to life on three legs.

Rearrange Furniture. Amputee cats can still launch themselves on and off the furniture, bedding, and other areas around your home, but they may need a lower stepping stool or other intermediate level surface to access their favorite higher spot without straining or injuring themselves. Front limb amputees may be less confident with jumping down, while hind limb amputees are not able to jump as high. Soft pillows for safer landing zones help while they adapt to their surroundings.

Weight Management. Maintaining a healthy weight, preferably on the lean side, is vital for amputee cats, not only for overall wellness, but also to support a pain-free active lifestyle. Excess weight places a greater stress load on joints and muscles, leading to discomfort and an increased risk of developing osteoarthritis.

Whether you decide to adopt a tripod cat, or your own cat unexpectedly becomes a tripod, take comfort in knowing three-legged animals don't feel sorry for themselves and are still able to participate in all activities.

The little highway kitten is already freely cruising around his new home. Once his fur grows back it will be difficult to tell him apart from any other cat while he's running, playing and enjoying life on three legs. Watching these adaptive animals is an inspiration, so if you have the opportunity to adopt, don't hesitate, try a tripod!

Editor's note: Take a closer look at the handsome cat in the author's photo at left. This kitty is missing his left hind leg.





Preventing Separation Anxiety

During this time of the Covid-19 pandemic, we are all searching for ways to stay healthy both physically and mentally. Many of us are turning to the comfort and companionship of animals. In fact, over the past six months, animal adoption centers around the country have experienced a surge in demand for pets. Life is so different right now; it's important to consider how things may shift back once the pandemic eases, and what this may mean for our pets who have become accustomed to our being around much of the time.

For newly adopted pets, the way things are right now is “normal” life, so it is important to prepare them for the changes that will happen after the time of quarantining has ended. Training our pets now will hopefully prevent or lessen separation anxiety. Here are some simple training techniques from Jamie Gregory, CPDT-KA, CBCC-KA, from the Association of Professional Dog Trainers.

1. Find time to leave your dog alone during this quarantine

- Act as though you are going to work, or the kids are going to school, just vacate the house for a short time
- Go through your typical daily grooming/preparations, as if you are going somewhere. Go through the motions of “preparing” your dog, as if you were to be gone for several hours, then leave for a short time
- If you typically crate your dog, make sure your dog is spending some time in the crate

2. Start slowly, and vary the amount of time you are away, particularly if your dog has had issues with separation anxiety in the past

- Leave for a couple of minutes and come back
- Slowly increase the amount of time you are gone
- Mix it up, so they never know if it will be 2 minutes, 15 minutes, or 3 hours

(continued next page)



Our Companions Canine Operations Director, Marie Joyner, receives questions every day about dogs and their behavioral issues. Marie's Den answers some of the more commonly asked questions.

3. Expose your dog to typical signs of your leaving, but without the associated negative experience of your actual departure

- Throughout the day, act out predictors that you are leaving (e.g., jingle your keys, put on shoes, get dressed and groomed for the day, or pick up a purse or backpack and act as though you are preparing to depart), without actually leaving
- While acting these scenarios out, walk over to the dog and give them a treat

4. When you do leave your dog, you should give them something extra special – something they would not get at any other time

- When a dog associates your leaving with getting something special, they will start to look forward to your leaving
- Some examples of something special might be: a treat scavenger hunt, a feeder toy with yummy treats, a scoop of cottage cheese, any treat they particularly love but don't often get, or a combination of these

5. Keep hellos and goodbyes brief

- It is not natural for dogs to have an emotional goodbye and hello
- This makes your leaving and their anticipation of your return more difficult for them
- When you leave your dog, just leave
 - ◊ They do not care that you are not saying goodbye; and
 - ◊ You are not going to hurt their feelings
- Your departure and arrival should be emotionless
- The calmer you are when you leave and return, the calmer your dog will be while you are gone

6. Make sure your dog's needs are met

- Dogs need structure, exercise, mental stimulation, and attention in their everyday lives



**DO YOU HAVE AN IDEA
FOR A FUTURE ARTICLE IN
"OUR COMPANIONS" MAGAZINE?**

Email susanl@ourcompanions.org

While no one can predict when our time of quarantining will end, following these techniques should help ease any stress associated with the eventual shifting back to our busier, less predictable lives. As always, Our Companions is here to help.

If you notice your dog is showing signs of separation stress, contact our Helpline at 860.242.9999 or via email at helpline@ourcompanions.org. We can answer your questions and guide you through training techniques in more detail.



If Cats Could Talk

Cats will never get a bad rap from us. In our eyes, no creature is more resilient, mysterious and beautiful than the majestic, free-thinking, self-determined feline. Some cats are ardent snugglers, and some are more independent; but all are worthy of our respect and consideration. By better understanding the way in which cats communicate, you can help ensure that your feline-inhabited home is a place of safety and comfort for all. Toward this end, Our Companions' Feline Behavioral expert Karen Aseltine offers the following tips.

Understand Your Cat

You may never completely remove all the stimuli that can influence a cat's behavior. However, here are some common aspects to consider:

- **Read the room.** Cats have definite preferences in how they wish to interact with their humans. Cats like their space and enjoy being free to make their own choices. Often, this means that they do not appreciate being hugged, kissed, or picked up. Let your cat initiate any type of physical touch between the two of you.



- **Stranger danger.** Cats are territorial and like to control the environment around them. They feel invaded when unknown strangers and animals enter their territory. Strangers bring new and different smells as well as unknown perceived dangers. Instruct visitors to wait for the cat to come to them before offering a gentle petting.

- **Avoid sudden change.** Any changes should take place slowly and gradually, whenever possible.

- **Silence is golden.** Cats do not like loud noises. They have a well-developed sense

of hearing and find loud noises, such as hair dryers, fireworks, and vacuum cleaners intolerable. It is also a good reason not to yell at your cat for bad behavior as it may only result in more bad behavior.

- **"I'm sorry, all I hear is your perfume"** is a popular meme and could have been penned by a cat. Cats have a keen sense of smell. Strongly scented perfumes, deodorizers, and cleaning products can be extremely offensive to them.

- **Cleanliness is next to godliness.** Cats are extremely fastidious animals and they don't want to use dirty litter boxes. Make sure you have the same number of litter boxes as you have cats and scoop at least once a day.

- **The opposite of happiness isn't sadness, it's boredom.** Cats need mental and physical stimulation as well as an enriching environment. They need plenty of toys, interactive playtime, and other enriching activities – but they need it on their terms. Do not force playtime on your cat; instead, be open to cues that tell you they are ready for some fun.

They Will Eventually Come Around
Cats are wildly complex beings, and their natural instincts are hard wired. At times they can be the fiercest of predators; at others they can be silly, affectionate, and sweet. Don't antagonize your cat by exacerbating or responding negatively to their more instinctive or irritable moods. Instead, be watchful for the signs that they are irritated, annoyed, stressed, or anxious and back away. Their mood will pass and eventually they'll be back for your affections. They will thank you for allowing them adequate space to be themselves.



Karen Aseltine is the Feline Behavior Manager and Caregiver at the Our Companions Sanctuary. Karen is a Certified Cat Behavior Counselor and serves as one of our resident "kitty psychologists." She receives questions every day about cat behavior. This column will highlight the most commonly asked questions.





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MARKETING SOLUTIONS



THE OUR COMPANIONS ANIMAL HELPLINE IS HERE FOR YOU!

Our Helpline is fully operational and ready to respond to those who need assistance. Someone will contact you within 24-48 hours!

If you have questions regarding:

- Adoption
- Cat/dog/rabbit behavioral advice
- Finding a new home for your pet
- Helping outdoor cats
- Veterinary assistance

Please call (860) 242-9999 or email Helpline@OurCompanions.org.

