

Guide for Whiskers Volunteers

With all the worthwhile organizations in need of volunteers, we appreciate the fact that you considered Whiskers. If you decide to join us after watching the orientation videos and reading this guide, we believe you'll find volunteering at Whiskers a rewarding experience.

Parking

Free parking is available on the street. The small grassy lot next to the shelter does not belong to Whiskers, so please don't park there. When there is a snow emergency, be sure to park on the correct side of the street per the City of Albany.

The Shelter Building

The exterior front door to the shelter has an electronic combination lock, and the interior front door also has a lock with the same combination. This combination is given to new volunteers after they have regularly worked at the shelter for several weeks. Until then, new volunteers must call the shelter number (489-4277) to have another volunteer open the doors for them.

Note: NEVER leave both the exterior and interior front doors open at the same time, and NEVER pick up or put your face near the cats. Even a friendly cat may hurt you, especially if it's startled!

Shelter Interior

First floor - Includes the "office," a bathroom, a "linen" closet, the main population room, a litterbox room, a laundry room, an assimilation room, a kitchen and a storage/supply room.

Second floor - Includes the FIV room, an "isolation room," a bathroom, the infirmary, the senior room, a utility room and the FeLV room.

Both floors have free-roaming and caged cats. Caged cats may be new to the shelter, on meds, on special diets, being prepped for surgery, aggressive toward other cats or bullied by other cats. Unless they're very ill, difficult to medicate, recovering from surgery or waiting for test results, cats usually remain caged for only a limited time.

Bulletin boards throughout the shelter have photos of the cats along with their names to help volunteers identify who's who.

Several dry-erase boards with various kinds of information on them are located throughout the first floor. Before beginning your shift, read these boards, which may answer questions or address concerns that arise. In addition, make your own notes as appropriate.

All areas have small refrigerators for storing medications and leftover cat food. Leftover cat food should be dated before being stored. All areas also have microwave ovens for warming leftover cat food.

Shelter Residents

Whiskers' cats come from many sources, including other shelters, adopters, foster homes, feral colonies, owners who can no longer care for their pets, and "the street." Whiskers accepts cats that many other shelters won't take (or will euthanize), including those with FIV and FeLV:

FIV – These cats have tested positive for feline immunodeficiency virus (FIV) or "kitty AIDS." FIV+ cats cannot transmit their virus to people but can transmit it to other cats, generally through deep bites. Therefore, FIV+ cats can live with uninfected cats, but all cats living in the same environment should be compatible with one another.

FeLV – These cats have tested positive for feline leukemia virus (FeLV). FeLV+ cats cannot transmit their virus to people but can easily transmit it to other cats even without direct contact. Therefore, FeLV+ cats can live only with other FeLV+ cats (or dogs, birds, etc.). Because FeLV is highly contagious among cats, the protocol for working in this room MUST be followed. Instructions are on the doorway to the room.

Shift Work

Shift work at the shelter involves feeding the cats and giving them fresh water, washing their dishes, scooping and cleaning litterboxes, changing bedding, doing laundry, cleaning cages, sweeping/mopping floors, reading/marking cage cards and taking out garbage/recyclables. These tasks are done on both shifts every day. Multiple volunteers share the workload, but some shifts have more volunteers than others. Each volunteer is responsible for a specific room or area, but when a shift has insufficient coverage, others on the shift should help where needed.

Note: Volunteers who work in the office are responsible for cleaning the downstairs bathroom. Volunteers who work in the FIV room are responsible for cleaning the upstairs bathroom.

Booties and plastic gloves, canned and dry cat food, paper products, utensils, fresh litter, clean bedding, cleaning products and equipment, and trash bags can be found in or near each room. Although the FeLV room has no sink, pitchers are available for getting clean drinking water and for dumping dirty water.

Wet Food

Large paper plates are used to feed wet food to the free-roaming cats, and small paper plates are used for the caged cats. A standard-size can (5.5 ozs.) of food should be broken up on a large plate and placed on the floor. Use a can for every four cats, and use different flavors/textures when available.

If small (3 oz.) cans are available, begin with a *half can each per two caged cats*, and give them more food or offer them a different flavor/texture if they don't eat the first plateful. Caged cats are usually stressed, so do whatever it takes to entice them to eat unless it's obvious they're eating their dry food. The important thing is that they eat.

Be sure to rinse out cat food cans and push lids into them for recycling.

Dry Food

Dry food should be available at all times for all cats unless otherwise indicated. Remove any damp or moldy food from bowls (check all the way to the bottom). Wash and dry bowls before adding food to them, and leave room at the top to keep the contents from being scattered and wasted.

Water

Wash water dishes, and refill them about $\frac{3}{4}$ of the way; this helps avoid spills. Spilled water results in messy cages and slippery floors. Always check that caged cats have sufficient water unless it's being withheld for medical reasons.

Litter and Litter Boxes

Soiled litter should be scooped out of boxes and clean litter added. If boxes are particularly dirty, dump their contents, scrape out solids, wash boxes in the utility sink (there's one on each floor), and refill them. The shelter's plumbing is old, so don't let litter or other solids get into the drain.

Bedding

Unless bedding has vomit, feces or urine on it, don't change it—just shake it out. Wipe, scrape or rinse off solids before adding dirty bedding to the laundry tub. It's better for the washer and nicer for those who do the laundry. If bedding or even an entire pet bed is seriously soiled, throw it out.

Clean bedding is stored in a closet off the main population room on the first floor and on shelves in some rooms. Volunteers who work on the second floor should replenish bedding (and other supplies) in their areas for the next shift.

Note: Use only one piece of bedding for each bed. This helps control spores that can spread disease and reduces the amount of dirty laundry that needs to be washed. If a cat bed or shelf needs extra padding, use a thicker piece of bedding, or fold a larger piece in half.

Laundry

Because the washer and dryer are on the first floor, volunteers on that floor generally do the laundry. The washer and dryer are used a LOT, so it's important to read and follow the instructions for them. Bleach and detergent are in the laundry room, and additional bottles are in the storage room off the downstairs kitchen.

Wash synthetics with other synthetics rather than with cottons, and do synthetic loads before doing cotton loads. Because cottons take much longer to dry, laundry gets backed up when they're done first or they're mixed with synthetics. *If you're ever the last person to leave the shelter, be sure to turn off both the washer and dryer even when loads aren't finished.*

Cages and Their “Furnishings”

On a shelf in the laundry room and in the utility room off the senior room are picnic jugs filled with diluted Tektrol cleaning liquid for refilling spray bottles throughout the shelter. Use this spray to clean plastic beds, litterboxes and cages, and refill spray bottles as needed with the funnels provided. Tektrol can irritate skin; wear plastic gloves to protect your hands. *Use dish soap to clean food and water dishes.*

Cage Cards

Index cards are attached to occupied cages. These cards include the cat’s name, gender, personality, date caged, eating habits, elimination habits and special notes. Read these cards before feeding cats or cleaning their cages. In addition, *always* date and mark the cards where indicated, and record your own observations if any. Keeping information current on these cards is extremely helpful to meds volunteers.

Shelves and Floors

Some shelving is high and difficult to reach, even when using a stepstool or ladder. Do the best you can, and at least try to remove dirty bedding and solid waste.

Thoroughly sweep floors before mopping them. Use the broom behind, between and under (rolling) cages, where there’s always scattered litter and dry food. Keeping areas free of food scraps helps discourage insects, especially during warm weather. *Mix undiluted Tektrol with hot water to mop floors.*

Garbage and Recyclables

Bags of garbage and items for recycling should be put in the appropriate containers in the yard behind the shelter—black top for garbage and green top for recyclables. Break down cardboard boxes before putting them in a recycling container. Plastic bags full of cat food cans should be emptied into a recycling container and the bags themselves put into a garbage container.

As you pass cages and through rooms on your way out of the shelter, check to make sure all cats have sufficient water and food to last until the next shift.

Schmoozing with the Cats

Toys and treats are welcome at the shelter, but check with an experienced volunteer before handing out treats. Some cats may be on special diets or have mouth issues such as gum disease or tooth decay.

When You Cannot Make Your Shift

If you cannot make your shift, you are responsible for trying to find a replacement. The easiest way to do this is by e-mailing the Whiskers list and indicating the day and time of your usual shift and where you normally work. Sometimes it’s necessary to ask more than once. Offering to return the favor may result in a better response. If you can’t get a sub, please let your shiftmates know before your next scheduled shift.

To be included on the e-mail list, e-mail Sandy Sidoti at asidoti@nycap.rr.com with your request. You will receive an invitation from Yahoo to join the group. You must respond to it for your name to be added to the list. If you don't see the invitation in your in-box, check your spam or junk folder.

If you have a last-minute emergency that will prevent you from making your shift and you can't get a replacement, try to contact at least one of your shiftmates as soon as possible to let them know. This will ensure that all cats are fed and their litterboxes cleaned—particularly essential for caged cats.

Meds Volunteers

Some volunteers administer medications and/or fluids to certain shelter cats. Those who want to become meds volunteers must train with experienced meds volunteers before working alone.

Whiskers' Adoption Center

Whiskers holds regular adoption clinics at our Clifton Park Adoption Center (CPAC) at the rear of the Pet Smart store. Adoptable cats and kittens stay in the center for a maximum of two weeks. Volunteers on morning and afternoon/evening shifts feed them and clean their cages and the "visiting" room. Potential volunteers for CPAC should mark this option on their application.

Foster Homes

Whiskers runs a foster program for kittens, pregnant cats and cats with special needs until they're adopted or can be relocated to the shelter. Please e-mail admin@whiskers.com for more information about Whiskers' foster program.

Tax Benefits for Volunteers

Volunteers who itemize their taxes can claim deductions for applicable mileage and for donations of cash, goods and services (other than feeding, cleaning, etc.) to Whiskers. Volunteers must keep their own records and request a tax receipt from Whiskers for the total each year.

Thanks again for considering us; Whiskers' volunteers really do make a difference...one life at a time!

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