

No Pet Should Ever Be Homeless

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Our Companions Domestic Animal Sanctuary, a nonprofit organization, is a leader in the movement to end the unnecessary euthanasia of pets in Connecticut. We are building a domestic animal sanctuary, providing low-cost training and educational services and creating a statewide partnership among animal welfare agencies to address the root causes of pet homelessness.

Quote of Compassion

A man is the sum of his actions, of what he has done, of what he can do, Nothing else.

- Mahatma Gandhi

Fall 2005

The Sum of Our Actions

By Susan Linker, CEO, Our Companions

You see a cat in your neighborhood or at your place of business. Perhaps you tell yourself that it likely belongs to a neighbor; but, over the next few weeks, you keep seeing it and it looks thinner and thinner, injured or just lost. If you aren't able to completely ignore this poor creature, then you, like most people, call someone who knows what to do: your local humane society, rescue organization or animal control. After several tries, the response is basically the same: "We don't take stray cats." "We don't have room." "Call someone else."



This cat would make a wonderful companion, if just one person took the time to help him.

Now what do you do?

Stray Cat Cut. Right now, stray cats are being turned away from Connecticut humane organizations, local municipal shelters and rescue groups. Even the largest animal welfare organization in the state has recently instituted a policy stating that they will not take stray or feral cats - only those cats turned in by their owners. With animal welfare organizations at capacity and unable or unwilling to act, what's to become of these cats?

The reality is that domestic cats face terrible odds when they are abandoned by their owners or lost. Domestic cats are not wild and are therefore not equipped with the skills necessary for living completely without human intervention. **If** they survive cold weather, diseases, predators and cruel humans, they may become semi-feral and join a colony of cats in order to protect themselves, and they may also breed more cats - all homeless. It's not a happy ending for the cat or for its offspring.

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Special Insert

What Next? A Guide to Helping a Stray Cat	3-4	The Impact of Inaction. Each and every day, we are faced with decisions that will either create the need for action or allow us to continue on in our day uninterrupted. The choice between starting an argument with your child over what they're wearing to school and being on time to work is one of many that are inconsequential at the time but which can have long term effects. The same can be said for turning your back on an animal in need.
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The Sum of Our Actions, (cont.)

It's understandable that for one reason or another, we fail to make decisions that will force us to take a positive action because we rationalize, "I don't have time." "It's not my responsibility." "Someone else will take care of it." "I don't want to get involved." etc. But have you ever thought about the effect this line of reasoning has on society and on you personally?

The most impactful social movements have begun as a result of individuals taking the initiative to effect change - the civil rights movement and women's suffrage come to mind easily. Had individuals not taken action, how likely is it that government would have made the right decisions? The reason why the biggest social movements have happened is that individuals have seen a need for change and knew that it was entirely up to them to make it happen. Inaction was unthinkable to the leaders of these movements. And the animal welfare movement is the largest social movement of today.



The decision to not take positive action is detrimental to our individual psyche as well as to society. If you've ever beaten yourself up about taking the easy way out, then you know what I mean. Instead of investing millions of dollars as a culture in self-help books, all in an effort to feel good about ourselves, we should invest in positive action when a choice is presented to us. Our actions as individuals will not only cause us to feel more positive about ourselves and our place in this world but will inspire others to do the same.

It's up to you. Take action to help her live a long, happy

The beauty of taking positive action is that it doesn't have to be monumental to make a huge impact. In the case of the neighborhood stray, your action does not have to be to assume full responsibility for its care forever - it can be to try to find its owner or find it a new home. If you do choose to take the cat in as your own, you will be rewarded with a lifetime of love and appreciation. And regardless of where the cat finds its home, you will know that you did the right thing. No act of kindness is ever in vain. It is these simple acts of kindness that truly make the world a better place.

Connecticut Cares for Cats Conference

Presented by the Animal Welfare Federation of Connecticut and the Petco Foundation, the Connecticut Cares for Conference will provide real insight and honest dialogue on the issues facing stray and feral cats and the humans who care for them. Our Companions is a founding member of the Animal Welfare Federation of Connecticut, a partnership of animal advocates across the state working to dramatically improve the welfare of pets. National leaders from the animal welfare community such as Best Friends Animal Society, Alley Cat Allies and Neighborhood Cats will be some of our featured presenters. And we are especially pleased that our own Attorney General, Richard Blumenthal, will be a special guest.

Experts on the stray and feral cat issue will discuss:

- the most successful and human programs reducing stray and feral cat population
- innovative public and private spay/neuter programs that can work in any community
- life-saving programs that benefit Animal Control Officers
- how to build a grass roots trap-neuter-return movement that has significant long-term benefits to the community

Together, we can make a difference. Attend if you are a:

- Shelter Director or Staff
- Rescue Group
- Animal Control Officer
- Board Member
- Animal Welfare Advocate
- Feral Cat Caretaker
- Volunteer or Animal Lover

The date is November 12, 2005 in Cromwell. Attendance is limited. Register today! The conference fee is \$35, \$25 if your registration is received by October 1, 2005.

To register, download a brochure and form at www.awfct.org. You can also register by calling (860) 965-6159 or e-mailing info@awfct.org.



Volunteer Spotlight - Risa Davidson, Dog Trainer

Risa Davidson is an excellent example of a dedicated animal lover who has passion, talent and interest in helping dogs.

Risa was drawn to Our Companions in part because of a special dog she adopted from a shelter - a German Shepherd mix named Millie. Millie is a sweet dog but it was clear that her unknown past was difficult. After taking Millie home, Risa discovered that she had serious fear issues making day-to-day life difficult - sometimes traumatic. After months of working with Millie by providing positive reinforcement and confidence building techniques, Risa discovered how dogs with even the most serious of problems can become wonderful, adjusted family companions.



Risa Davidson and Millie, her four-legged companion.

Motivated to help others with their canine companions, Risa became involved in the Our Companions Lead Program, which teaches volunteers how to become professional positive reinforcement dog trainers. Risa brought with her many years of experience from training her own dogs, attending typical training classes, and working at doggie daycares. After two years of working through our Lead training program and attending many outside training seminars, Risa is teaching many of our Sunday classes which focus on dogs with special needs - needs that are not addressed in most training classes. Risa is also providing one-on-one training services to many of our clients whose dog(s) are too reactive to attend class.

Risa is one of our favorite success stories. Through her compassion and first hand experience in adopting a reactive dog, she has rescued countless other dogs from homelessness, and likely destruction had they had to enter into traditional shelters. Thanks to Risa for all of her hard work and dedication and to Millie for being such a great inspiration.

A Great Loss for Connecticut - Janet Orio Memorial



Janet Orio and Bubba, one of the many animals she helped to save.

Windsor Locks Animal Control Officer and Our Companions friend, Janet Orio passed away on Thursday, June 2, 2005.

Janet's death is a great loss for Our Companions and everyone in the animal welfare community. Her lifetime love of animals was profound and unconditional. Janet was unwavering in her compassion and utterly selfless, caring for animals that no one else cared for, and often times in doing so putting her safety and career at great risk. The lengths she would go to as a means of preserving the lives of animals in need was inspiring.

Making Janet's passing all the more devastating was Windsor Locks' approval to allocate money to rebuild horrific Windsor Locks pound after a decade-long long battle. Although she will not be able to enjoy the new facility, Janet's leadership and involvement in the effort will be part of her tremendous legacy to Windsor Locks and the animals she so loved.

There is another particularly poignant aspect to Janet's passing - just weeks before her passing, Janet finally placed Bubba the pit bull. Many of you know of Bubba, have met Bubba, and certainly have heard his sad story. This loving dog became a symbol for everything Janet, and Our Companions stands for. Janet would not give up on this wonderful creature who deserved to have a home - who deserved to live. There are few shelters and even fewer pounds that would have kept Bubba alive. But thanks to her willful determination and passion, shortly before her death, Janet had the privilege of seeing him finally find peace in a loving home. The photo of Janet was taken on the day she dropped off Bubba to his new home. They're both glowing with happiness.

I take comfort in knowing that Janet will be looking down on all of us, acting as our guardian angel as we carry her torch and continue the heartbreaking, challenging and rewarding work of saving homeless animals in need. Her spirit will be with us as we continue to carry on her work with the Windsor Locks Animal Pound and make sure her dream will be one day realized.

What Next? - A Guide to Helping a Stray Cat

With thousands of abandoned cats wandering our neighborhoods and only a handful of organizations equipped to help them, community involvement is essential to the survival of stray cats. Our Companions has received countless phone calls from concerned people who don't know what to do with a stray cat. The important thing is that if you care enough to call us, then you care enough to do the right thing by this cat and help find its way to a new home. The guide below was compiled from the Our Companions Forever Home Manual and information from Best Friends Animal Sanctuary and Maddie's Fund. Pull this page out and save it - you never know when you may come across a stray cat in need of your help!

How do you know if the cat's been abandoned and not just someone's outdoor cat? If you can get close enough to the cat, check for a tag first. If you can't get close enough or there isn't a tag, try feeding the cat to get a better look at it. You may have to do this for a few days to win its trust. Check to see if it's injured or looks unhealthy. Domesticated cats will likely come to you with food but feral cats probably won't; instead, they may hiss and run away.

Cat won't come to you. Maybe it's feral? Feral cats are not socialized to people. They range from cats who have never had human contact to those who were once pets - semi-feral. Often living in loose associations called "colonies," feral cats become well adapted to their territory and can live safely and contentedly without much human contact. If you've tried to get a cat to come to you, even with food, and it runs in the opposite direction, it may very well be feral and can't be adopted into a home. Though not the topic of this guide, there are non-lethal solutions for feral cats. Visit www.ourcompanions.org for resources.

The cat has a tag. If there's a tag and the owner's name is on it, call the number and verify the pet is theirs, either describing the pet or having a picture and vet records. Sometimes, a rabies tag gives the name of a veterinarian's clinic. Call during business hours and get the name and phone number of the owner using the code number on the tag and then call the owner. While stray dogs are required to go to the municipal shelter in the town where the dog was found, cats are not required to be impounded directly.

The cat does not have a tag but appears to be in good health. You have a few options: try to find the owner yourself or try to relinquish the cat at a shelter. In either case, you need to take possession of the cat. Be patient when trying to get the cat to come to you - it's always better to let it make the choice rather than grabbing it. Slowly lure the cat into a crate with food and shut the door behind it.

If you must take the animal to a shelter, be sure to claim first and last rights should you wish to continue to relate to the animal. First rights give you an adoption privilege if the owner does not claim the animal. Last rights again gives you adoption privileges if the animal is not claimed within a given time period and is due to be euthanized. It is a good idea to call the pound daily to let them know that you are interested in the animals' welfare. Be aware that some municipal shelters will not take a stray cat. And if they do, some municipal shelters hold onto pets for a very limited time until they are euthanized - some are as little as five days.

While you're looking for the owner. Finding the animal a home yourself rather than taking it to a shelter is almost always preferable. This is because most shelters are already working at capacity and finding a home for the animal yourself will ensure that it gets more individualized attention. Also, a home environment is less stressful than even the best shelter, and a happier animal means a better adoption.

Start out by keeping the animal in a small part of the house, such as a bathroom, laundry room. It's always wise to separate rescue pets from your own. If the cat appears to be very nervous, it's best to keep it in a large dog crate with its food, water, bed and litter inside. Once you've observed the animal for a few days, you can make a better judgment about how much free rein to allow it in your home. If you cannot keep the animal in your home, ask friends and family to help you out, or look for a boarding facility in which to house the animal. Don't house the animal too far away from your home or it will be hard to show the animal to the owner or potential adopters later.

Once you have the animal in your possession, make every effort to locate his or her person.

- Post "found" flyers for several blocks surrounding the location where you found the animal. Drive around looking for "lost" signs as well. Since people describe the same animal in different ways, respond to any flyers that generally describe the animal you have found.



Try leaving some food out for a stray cat. You'll win their trust and be able to get a closer look at them to check for a tag or injuries.

- Call or visit animal shelters in the vicinity to place a "found" notice and check their lost and found books to see if you can find a "lost" notice for the animal. Find shelters by looking in the front of your phone book under "Animal Control" and in the yellow pages under "Humane Society."
- Look at "lost" ads in current and back newspapers. Immediately place a "found" ad—some newspapers will place these ads for free. A typical ad describes the type of animal, where he/she was found, coloring and other distinct characteristics. You may want to leave out some characteristics about the animal, so that when a person calls claiming to be the owner, you can verify that the animal is really theirs. For example, you could leave out information about the gender of the animal, or that he/she has white feet, or a really short or bushy tail. Don't forget your phone number and times you can be reached.
- Ask your veterinarian or local animal shelter if they can scan the animal for a microchip, a small chip implanted under the pet's skin for identification.

Beware of dishonest callers. When someone answers your ad, make sure they give you a detailed description of the animal. To ensure you have found the animal's real owner here are a few tips. Ask the caller to bring a photo of the animal to the meeting place—again always meet in a neutral territory for your own safety.

- Ask for their veterinarians' phone number, and make a follow up call.
- See how the animal reacts to the caller in person. If you are not satisfied, ask for more proof of ownership.
- Remember to get the owners phone number and address. Be advised that there are people who will adopt animals and will sell them for laboratory research. Called "bunchers," they may claim a stray as their own in order to make money by selling the animal to a licensed "B" dealer.

Owner can't be found - starting the adoption process.

- Have the cat spayed or neutered. If it appears sick or underweight, seek the advice of a veterinarian. Many veterinarians give discounts for rescued animals - don't be shy about asking, but remember, veterinarians have to make a living too. Our Companions can also help through our low-cost spay/neuter program.
- Once you've provided the animal with a clean bill of health, start looking for a home - unless you decide to keep it! As almost anyone who has rescued strays can attest, friends, family, coworkers, and neighbors are valuable adoption resources. Not only are they potential adopters, but they can help spread the word to others as well.
- If this avenue doesn't work out, start advertising in newspapers, with flyers, and on internet rescue sites. When writing an ad, be sure to make it catchy - mention a particularly interesting quality the animal has, such as big paws, a loud purr, or a squeaky meow. Also, taking a great photograph for the ad will help.
- Post flyers at veterinary offices, pet supply stores, grocery stores, libraries, cafes, or anywhere around town. Be sure to talk to people about the animal whenever you can - you never know who might be interested in adopting.
- Local rescue groups, while they are usually at capacity, may be willing to let you share their adoption space at local pet supply stores. There are also websites where you can post adoption ads - do an internet search for "pet rescue," or "pet adoption board" to find websites that serve your community, or visit www.petfinder.org. There are also special breed rescue groups which may have people waiting to adopt a particular breed of cat. Our Companions can help you promote the cat through our rescue outreach program.

Screening. Once you've done your "marketing," be prepared for the phone calls. You will definitely want to screen callers to ensure the match is a good one. Start by finding out what they are looking for in a companion animal and if your rescue fits. Let the animal's personality be a guide for what questions you ask. Is the animal good with cats, dogs, and kids? Does she have any characteristics that warrant a more experienced pet owner? Other questions you might consider are: Will the animal be allowed inside the house? What does the potential adopter think about declawing? Have they had pets before? You can also ask for references - both personal and from a veterinarian.

Once you've done some initial screening and have a good candidate, bring the animal and person together to meet. Ask any additional questions, and decide ahead of time whether you will charge an adoption fee or ask the adopter to sign an adoption agreement. Let adopters know that if the adoption is not working out that they can bring the animal back to you. After a week or so, give the adopters a call to find out if they have any questions or concerns and find out how the animal is adjusting to its new home.

Resources. Our Companions can offer you a tremendous amount of resources so you can help save the life of a cat. On our website, www.ourcompanions.org, you will find our Forever Home manual which goes into greater depth on adopting out a homeless animal. If you don't find what you need there, don't hesitate to contact an Our Companions volunteer for additional help.

