

Mission: Meow Program Launched to Help Shelter Cats

Animal Humane Society of Minnesota seeks temporary homes for 300 cats.

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Mission: Meow is designed to give adult cats a better chance at adoption. Throughout the summer and fall months, the Animal Humane Society of Minnesota traditionally takes in thousands of kittens each month — which results in a rapid decline of adult cat adoptions. To help ease the burden at the shelter's five facilities and to give the adult cats a better chance at adoption later in the year, the AHS has launched Mission: Meow, a foster care program.

Mission: Meow foster parents will invite adult cats (each of which will be vaccinated, de-wormed, spayed or neutered and microchipped) into their homes for a six-month period, starting in June, July or August. The cats will return to the Animal Humane Society at a time when potential pet owners historically consider adopting adult cats instead of kittens.

The new twist in the Mission: Meow program is this: The Animal Humane Society will provide the food, toys, litter and litterbox for each foster cat. The new foster parent simply provides a safe home and love, said Tracie Jacobson, AHS spokeswoman.

A family selects a cat to foster at the Animal Humane Society of Minnesota. "We are looking for people who have the space and are willing to dedicate time and energy to a feline houseguest," Jacobson said. "It's a great opportunity for anyone over the age of 18 willing to make a commitment to helping cats in need."

Each participant will receive a Mission: Meow identification card that will allow the person to pick up food and litter refills during the foster period.

"The success of the program is contingent on public response and will in many ways speak to how our community feels about cats and their willingness to partner with us to reduce euthanasia numbers," she said. "This is an opportunity for the public to take action to help cats in need and it will be interesting to see the response."

Benefits that the shelter hopes to realize with this program include: Reduced numbers of cats euthanized for lack of space over the heavy intake months Increased adult cat adoptions due to the cats coming back to the shelter at a time when they have a better chance of being adopted An opportunity to educate the public on the cat population problem and engage them to help cats in need

A cat waits for adoption at Animal Humane Society of Minnesota. There are also risks involved, Jacobson said, which include the foster parents' ability to fulfill the required six-month commitment. If the cat is returned sooner, the overcrowding situation hasn't changed and the cat again is at risk for euthanasia.

Janelle Dixon, CEO of the AHS, said that's a risk worth taking in order to help a large number of cats. Mission: Meow gives adult cats a chance to be away from the sometimes stressful shelter environment, where illnesses can be contracted and spread, she said.

"In the face of adversity around the cat overpopulation, there are some creative ways that we in animal welfare can look at the situation and try to effect a change to address the problem," Dixon said.