



## **FFOCAS DIY Cat Rescue Resources: How to Help a Cat or Kitten Who May Be Lost or Homeless**

Frederick Friends of Our County Animal Shelter (FFOCAS) frequently receives requests for assistance from individuals who have found one or more kittens or adult cats outside. We and other animal welfare organizations in the area are often overwhelmed with such requests, especially during “kitten season” (roughly April through October); therefore, we may not be able to help. This handout is meant to provide guidance for those who choose to help kitties found outside. The suggestions in this handout are our own and are not necessarily endorsed by any other organization or agency.

*We appreciate your compassion and your efforts to help animals!*

### **Quick Reference (click the hyperlinks in electronic document):**

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## FOUND FELINE: LEGAL AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

If you find a friendly (human-socialized) cat or kitten, remember that she may have a family who misses her very much. An animal who is missing for only a couple of weeks can become matted, dirty, and thin. Some animals appear fearful (making us think they've been mistreated) when they've been out on their own for a while.

So don't assume that the kitty is homeless or was neglected by her owner. **Do everything you can to find the cat's family—everything you'd want a finder to do if you lost your own beloved pet:**

- File a "found report" with Frederick County Animal Control (FCAC) (301-600-1546, [animalcontrol@frederickcountymd.gov](mailto:animalcontrol@frederickcountymd.gov)) and any other nearby county shelters, especially if the kitty was found near a county line.
- Post the found cat on [www.pawboost.com](http://www.pawboost.com).
- Post the found cat on [www.facebook.com/FredCoMDLostPets](https://www.facebook.com/FredCoMDLostPets) and potentially lost/found social media pages for other counties, depending on where the cat was found.
- Post the found cat on [www.nextdoor.com](http://www.nextdoor.com) and neighborhood-specific Facebook groups.
- Take the cat to be scanned for a microchip. Any vet should be able to do this for you. FCAC can also scan the kitty for a chip—if an owner is found, FCAC will contact them; if not, the shelter will take the kitty in.
- Post "found cat" flyers throughout the area where s/he was found. Ask area vet clinics to print and post the flyer as well.

Note: Some people commenting on your social media posts may offer to adopt the cat. Do not give the cat to anyone without (a) making every effort to find the cat's family (all steps listed above) for 5 days (the county's stray hold period) and (b) carefully screening the individual (we can help with this!).

Your local shelter (in Frederick County, that's FCAC) is often the first place people will go to look for a missing pet. For this reason, we urge you to consider bringing the found cat to FCAC. *However, it is crucial that you at least notify FCAC of the kitty via a found report, even if you do not take the cat to FCAC right away.*

If you do take the kitty to FCAC or another county shelter, do still post her as found on social media, pawboost, and similar sites because the shelter may not employ social media or other lost/found pet alerts.

Be aware that, like it or not, **pets are considered property**; do not keep or rehome any pet without making every reasonable attempt to find the animal's owner, giving the owner at least 5 days to come forward. Legally, the best option may be to bring the animal to FCAC to allow them to take responsibility for identifying the owner and reuniting them with their pet.

If you do keep the cat or kitten for any period of time, be sure to keep her separate from your own pets *for at least 10 days* (as a quarantine period) and, in that time, take her to a vet to ensure that she is healthy and unlikely to transmit a contagious illness to your pets or you. Separation will also help minimize stress for the found kitty and your own pets, who will need time to adjust to each other.

*If you cannot separate the cat from your pets; provide healthy food, fresh water, a safe indoor space, and vet care as needed for the found kitty; and/or if you cannot follow all of the bulleted steps above to find an owner, please bring her to FCAC.*

### **IF THE CAT IS INJURED OR ILL**

If possible, put the cat in a cat carrier for transport to a veterinarian. You may want to wear gloves and gently wrap the cat in a towel to protect yourself from being bitten. **Sick or injured animals can be more likely to bite out of fear or pain, and cats can carry and transmit rabies, which is deadly to humans if treatment is delayed.** So take care if you attempt to handle the cat. If you have any doubt about your ability to safely get the cat into a carrier, call FCAC at 301-600-1546 for assistance from an animal control officer.

If you are able to handle the cat, bring him to a veterinary clinic. If it's after hours or your regular vet is not able to accommodate an urgent care appointment, one of these emergency vet clinics may be able to help:

- VetUrgency ([veturgency.com](http://veturgency.com)), 434 Prospect Blvd., Frederick, MD, 301-288-8387
- Bennett Creek Animal Hospital ([clarksburgvet.com](http://clarksburgvet.com)), 22416 Frederick Rd., Clarksburg, MD, 301-515-8800
- Veterinary Referral Associates ([www.vravet.com](http://www.vravet.com)), 500 Perry Parkway, Gaithersburg, MD, 301-215-3218
- Care Veterinary Center ([carefrederick.com](http://carefrederick.com)), 1080 West Patrick St., Frederick, MD, 301-662-2273
- Mountain View Animal Emergency ([mountainviewemergency.com](http://mountainviewemergency.com)), 13810 Crayton Blvd., Hagerstown, MD, 301-733-7339

If you need financial assistance with emergency vet costs, ask the veterinary clinic if they will accept Care Credit ([www.carecredit.com/vetmed](http://www.carecredit.com/vetmed)) or Scratch Pay ([scratchpay.com](http://scratchpay.com)) or contact the Frederick County Humane Society (FCHS): [www.fchs.org](http://www.fchs.org), 301-694-8300, [info@fchs.org](mailto:info@fchs.org). But note that FCHS can help only if you contact them *prior* to bringing the cat to the vet.

If none of these options will work, please bring the cat to FCAC. Call FCAC, at 301-600-1546, for guidance on bringing the kitty to the shelter.

Be aware that this shelter, as with all open-admission shelters, has extremely limited resources. They are compassionate and skilled and can provide humane euthanasia for animals who are suffering. **FCAC will do their best to save every animal brought to them** if they have the resources and if their veterinary staff believe that the animal has a good chance at a good quality of life. However, animals who are ill or injured with a poor prognosis, animals who are suffering acutely, and those who are unsocialized are at risk of euthanasia, and this is true for any open-admission shelter.

## **IF YOU'VE FOUND A KITTEN OR LITTER OF KITTENS**

Don't assume that taking kittens indoors is the best thing for them. Organizations that specialize in helping *community cats* (formerly called *feral cats*) recommend leaving them be unless they are clearly in danger or distress. This is particularly the case for the very youngest kittens (under about 4 weeks of age), who may not survive if they are taken away from the mom cat. (Mom cat also can suffer—e.g., from mastitis, in addition to emotional distress—with the sudden removal of her kittens.)

Alley Cat Allies has guidance for determining if the kittens should be taken in:  
[www.alleycat.org/take-action/leave-them-be/](http://www.alleycat.org/take-action/leave-them-be/)

Another good source is from Adoptapet:  
[www.adoptapet.com/blog/uploads/2021/12/If-you-find-kittens.pdf](http://www.adoptapet.com/blog/uploads/2021/12/If-you-find-kittens.pdf)

If you do end up needing to take in the kittens and they are 4 weeks old or younger (weighing 1 pound or less) with no mom cat, the best solution is to bring them to a rescue with experience caring for very young, orphaned “bottle baby” kittens. Immediately contact the following:

- Animal Welfare League of Arlington, [www.awla.org](http://www.awla.org), 703-931-9241 (this organization specializes in “bottle baby” kittens)
- PetConnect Rescue, [www.petconnectrescue.org](http://www.petconnectrescue.org), 877-838-9171
- Animal Welfare League of Frederick County, [www.awlfc.org](http://www.awlfc.org), 301-663-5855
- Contact FFOCAS too as we may be able to help you reach out to the above and other rescue organizations. Contact us through our shelter intake prevention program, Project Hope ([project.hope.frederick@gmail.com](mailto:project.hope.frederick@gmail.com), 240-415-8835).

If none of the above organizations can help, or you don't get a response quickly enough, take the kittens to FCAC. Call first: 301-600-1546. FCAC regularly works with the above listed organizations and other rescues and will attempt to place the kittens with them if they are unable to help the kittens themselves. Do not delay as the youngest kittens are extremely vulnerable to multiple health issues.

We do not advise this, but if you decide to care for the kittens yourself, you can find information on neonatal kitten care at: [www.kittenlady.org](http://www.kittenlady.org).

Alley Cat Allies also has a neonatal kitten care guide:  
[www.alleycat.org/community-cat-care/caring-for-neonatal-kittens](http://www.alleycat.org/community-cat-care/caring-for-neonatal-kittens)

Even if the kittens are weaned and seem healthy, be aware that the vetting requirements of just one kitten—including vaccinations, spay/neuter, testing for FIV and FeLV, and “sick visits” for very common issues such as upper respiratory infections—will be expensive. If you are not going to be able to cover the costs, do not keep the kitten(s) or give them to another individual who also will not be able to provide necessary vetting.

**Adopting out a kitten who has not had proper vet care (such as spay/neuter and vaccinations) directly contributes to further suffering and homelessness of cats and kittens.** Place the kitten(s) with an organization that knows what it's doing or be prepared for the expense and work that will be involved in providing proper care and preparation for adoption, and in finding a loving forever home, as described in the following sections.

## FINDING A FOREVER HOME

If you have found a cat or kitten, you've taken all the steps listed above to find his family ([Found Feline: Legal and Ethical Considerations](#)) and no owner has come forward, and if you choose not to take the kitty to the shelter, then you have two options: (1) find a rescue organization or (2) take on the responsibility of caring for the cat and finding a home yourself.

Many cats and kittens are in need of homes; feline rescue organizations are nearly always inundated. However, it is worth asking them to take in the kitty as they have a great deal of experience providing necessary vet care and finding good homes. Be sure to research any rescue organization before handing the cat over to them as they all have strengths and weaknesses. For example, some large rescues save hundreds of cats each year, but the volume of felines they handle may mean that they are not able to provide the careful matchmaking that a very shy cat or one with a chronic medical condition would need. Here are some organizations you may want to start with, though there are many other great rescues out there:

- Pets Bring Joy ([petsbringjoy.org/ownerAssistance.html](http://petsbringjoy.org/ownerAssistance.html))
- Animal Welfare League of Frederick County ([www.awlfc.org](http://www.awlfc.org), 301-663-5855)
- Friends for Life Cat Rescue ([www.friendsforlifecatrescue.org/wp/](http://www.friendsforlifecatrescue.org/wp/), 240-818-3688)
- PetConnect Rescue ([www.petconnectrescue.org](http://www.petconnectrescue.org), 877-838-9171)

If you decide to take on responsibility for the cat and for finding him a loving home, be aware that **this is a big responsibility**; the vet care required can cost hundreds of dollars even for a relatively healthy young adult cat, and rehoming responsibly—screening adopters and adequately preparing them for adoption—can be time consuming. If you are not prepared to do this, and if no rescue organization is able to help, bring the kitty to FCAC.

If you do decide to take on this responsibility, the cat will need the following. Numbers 1–5 should happen before you allow the kitty to have direct contact with your own pets:

1. A thorough veterinary exam. If he is a senior or showing signs of possible illness, listen to the vet's recommendations for blood work or other diagnostics. There are people interested in adopting special needs kitties though so, if he does have an illness requiring, e.g., medication or a special diet, don't despair!
2. Vaccinations. Rabies is required by state law and the "distemper" vaccine is crucial too as it prevents multiple terrible diseases.
3. Test for FIV and FeLV as most adopters in this area will want to know the kitty's FIV and FeLV status because these illnesses are transmissible and can shorten the life span.
4. Possibly treatment for worms.
5. Flea/tick prevention.
6. Spay/neuter. This must happen before kitty goes to the new home!

You may find that the kitty is already spayed or neutered—perhaps the cat had a home at one point or was spayed/neutered (with the tip removed from one ear as a sign) by an organization or individual conducting TNR (trap–neuter–return). If the kitty has not been spayed/neutered, you will need to get that done to ensure that your efforts to help the kitty do not ultimately contribute to further feline suffering and homelessness.

To find a good home for the cat, we suggest that you use both of these options to reach the largest possible audience:

- Contact FFOCAS through Project Hope ([project.hope.frederick@gmail.com](mailto:project.hope.frederick@gmail.com)).
- Post the cat on Adoptapet: <http://www.adoptapet.com> (click on "rehome a pet").

Project Hope/FFOCAS can help you by marketing the cat on PetFinder and Facebook and by providing a rehoming application to help you screen potential adopters. We run a criminal background check to search for charges of animal cruelty or other violent behavior; we provide guidance on completing the screening yourself, such as by

contacting personal references; and we provide guidelines to potential adopters to help ensure a successful adjustment to the new home.

Adoptapet is a DIY service that also provides marketing (on adoptapet.com) and an application but will not provide personalized assistance.

If you also promote the cat on social media or elsewhere on your own, and you find a potential adopter that you do not personally know, be sure to have them fill out an application—whether FFOCAS' or Adoptapet's.

## HOW TO SAVE MONEY ON VET COSTS

Several clinics may be able to provide lower-cost services, including:

- Promise Animal League ([www.apromise.org](http://www.apromise.org)) in Boonsboro, MD. General vet care, such as vaccinations, and spay/neuter surgeries at reduced cost. Texting rather than calling may be best (301-465-9473).
- Spay Now ([www.spaynow.com](http://www.spaynow.com)) in Laurel and Grasonville, MD. Low-cost spay/neuter surgeries and other surgeries.
- Spay Today ([www.spay-today.org](http://www.spay-today.org)) in Charles Town, WV. Discounted spay/neuter surgeries in VA, WV & MD.
- Fifty Shades of Furr ([www.fiftyshadesoffurr.org](http://www.fiftyshadesoffurr.org)) in Hagerstown, MD. Spay/neuter surgeries and vaccinations at reduced cost.
- Spay Spa & Neuter Nook ([www.spayspa.org](http://www.spayspa.org)) in Davidsonville, MD. Reduced cost spay/neuter, vaccinations, dentals, and tests.
- Adams County SPCA ([www.adamscountyspca.org](http://www.adamscountyspca.org)) in Gettysburg, PA. Reduced cost spay/neuter and rabies vaccinations.
- PetVet ([petvet.vippetcare.com](http://petvet.vippetcare.com)). Mobile clinics at Tractor Supply stores in Frederick County on Saturdays and a walk-in clinic in Hagerstown, MD. Vaccinations, tests, and preventatives. They *can* be less expensive than a regular veterinary hospital because they do not charge an exam fee, and they can be convenient because they don't require an appointment. But whether they are a better deal, cost-wise, depends on what you need done.

Two organizations in Frederick County may be able to provide modest assistance (though they may have income requirements) for any type of vet care. They sometimes also are able to offer low-cost spay/neuter programs that don't have income requirements:

- Frederick County Humane Society ([www.fchs.org](http://www.fchs.org), 301-694-8300, [info@fchs.org](mailto:info@fchs.org))
- Animal Welfare League of Frederick County ([www.awlfc.org](http://www.awlfc.org), 301-663-5855)

**When you ask for help:** Please keep in mind that the people you contact at animal welfare/rescue organizations, county shelters, and low-cost vet clinics are either volunteers or are overworked and underpaid. They love what they do but it's difficult work that never stops. They typically receive numerous requests for help each day and they tend to see both the best and the worst of pet parents and situations. For this reason, it's important to be kind and patient and to be ready to provide all the information you can about the cat's temperament and health so that the volunteer or staff person can quickly assess whether and how they can help.

**QUESTIONS?**

If you have any questions navigating the resources in this booklet, please contact FFOCAS' Project Hope: [project.hope.frederick@gmail.com](mailto:project.hope.frederick@gmail.com). We prefer email, but if you need help and are unable to email, please text (do not call): 240-415-8835.