



# The Mayhew Animal Home Cat Fostering Introduction

## **The fostering process**

Thank you for your interest in cat fostering with The Mayhew Animal Home. This document introduces you to our fostering process, and explains the variety of fostering options that are available:

1. Read this document, then if interested, complete a Fostering Application Form stating what types of fostering you are would like to commit to.
2. Have an informal chat/interview with one of our fostering team.
3. Have a home visit from one of our Volunteer Home Visitors.
4. If a suitable cat is available and would benefit from fostering, make arrangements to collect the cat for your first foster.

## **Eligibility**

To foster cats you must be located within a ten-mile radius of The Mayhew Animal Home.

You will need to be prepared to collect and return the cat and keep any medical appointments which may be booked for the foster cat.

Other than pet refuge cats and parent cats with kittens, you will need to work part time, or be home all day to offer cats a suitable amount of human stimulation.

For cats which are available for re-homing, you must be prepared and be comfortable to allow prospective adopters to visit your home by appointment. Our cat adoption officer will have interviewed all prospective adopters, and only those who would make a suitable match will be offered a viewing.

## **Expenses**

We are unable to provide travel expenses but can provide food, bedding, and toys, litter etc, however as a charity we welcome and appreciate any help towards these provisions.

## **Issues**

Should the cat become ill, you must agree to bring it back to The Mayhew for veterinary treatment, or in case of an emergency out of normal Mayhew hours, contact Putney Animal Hospital on 0870 908 5316 / Mayhew 0208 968 2448. The Mayhew will not pay for private veterinary fees.

From time to time we do have instances that the cat placed does not work out. Please inform us immediately and make arrangements for the cat to return to The Mayhew.

## **Types of cat**

We have a variety of cats looking for foster homes from The Mayhew, each needing varying degrees of human input, care and time in your home. You must consider this whilst deciding what kinds of cats you would like to foster, as The Mayhew Animal Home, and the cats you care for, need a firm commitment.

Staff at The Mayhew will work with you to ensure that cats selected to go on foster are the most suitable for your circumstances. Of course this may mean that sometimes we don't have a suitable cat to foster, however we will notify you when one becomes available.

### **Types of cat continued....**

Please note that in the case of a foster carer being unable to care for the foster cat on a short-term basis, The Mayhew need as much notice as possible in order to place cats back into our cattery.

There now follows information about the various types of cat we have looking for a loving foster home from The Mayhew Animal Home.

### **The stressed cat: General commitment 4 – 6 weeks**

All cats that come to The Mayhew Animal Home react differently to their new environment, and don't always give a true reflection of their personality. Some show stress by showing signs of aggression; others simply don't move from their beds. Because of factors like these, it becomes difficult to judge what a stressed cat will be like in a normal home environment, and therefore difficult to find it the best possible home for its individual needs.

To deal with these issues, where would be better than a home environment to give a stressed cat attention and love and really understand its nature? Foster carers can provide valuable information that helps us to match a cat with its appropriate permanent home.

It's important to understand and respect that these cats are very stressed and therefore need to be approached carefully and with patience. For this kind of cat, a foster home must be a stress free environment with no young children or other animals.

You must take responsibility for making sure there are no doors or windows left open. These cats can be very frightened and may look for an escape route. It's important to settle your cat into a room where he or she can feel secure. You can increase the access around the home when they begin to feel more confident. Make sure the room is already set up for them before arriving and allow them to come out of their carrier in their own time.

There are various reasons for a cat being stressed. It may be that the cat simply did not like being surrounded by other cats in the cattery and settles very quickly, or this could take time and require cajoling. One option to encourage the cat to explore is using feathers, or something similar to carry out stroking motions. You should come closer slowly until you can stroke the cat yourself. Food is also a good way of approaching stressed cats. Use treats to lure them nearer to you and encourage them to take the food from your hand!

### **Long stay / Hard to home cat: General commitment 4 - 6 weeks**

On occasion, cats may stay at The Mayhew for long periods of time. This could be for medical reasons, behaviour, age, or sometimes just the colour of their fur. We like to offer these cats a short respite from the cattery environment and a foster home is the ideal solution.

### **Pet Refuge: General commitment 2 weeks - 3 months**

Our Pet Refuge scheme offers a lifeline for owners who are temporarily unable to look after their cats due to emergencies such as illness, hospitalisation or mental health issues. These cat owners are without family or friends in a position to help, but will continue to care for their cat in the long term.

In these instances we always try to find foster homes. There is no need for the cat to be in our cattery as it doesn't need to be viewed by prospective owners.

### **Mum and kittens: General commitment - return at eight weeks old**

Although The Mayhew has a strong neutering policy, we sometimes get cats in that have already given birth. A cattery is not the best environment for a mother with young kittens as they are highly vulnerable to infection and stress.

When fostering a mum and kittens you will need to make sure there is a quiet, warm place for them to stay. As the kittens get a little older and more independent it's important that the mother cat has space to wander and stretch her legs. Like most mothers, she may feel she wants some space and a little time out. Fresh water must also be available at all times. Foster carers take on the important responsibilities of socialising kittens with humans and of weaning.

Kittens are usually weaned at 4 weeks old. Initially this is done by offering wet kitten food liquidised completely with cooled boiled water. The consistency must be very runny as the kittens must learn to lap before they can eat solid food. They need to be offered fresh food every three to four hours, with this time period extending as the kittens grow. The consistency of the food can become more solid as the kittens progress with independent eating.

On occasion some kittens take longer to wean preferring to suckle from the mother cat. If by six weeks of age the kittens are not showing any signs of lapping, the mother cat should be removed for a short period of time at kitten feeding time. This will encourage the kittens to look for food other than from their mum.

By the time the kittens are eight to nine weeks old, they should be eating normal kitten food four times daily. At this point, the mum and kittens will be returned to The Mayhew for neutering, vaccinating and rehoming.

Further information and support will be provided for fosterers weaning kittens.

### **Feral kittens: Minimum commitment 2 - 4 weeks, depending on progress**

Our feral kittens are usually born wild in the community, then trapped with their mother and brought to The Mayhew Animal Home. The mother is then neutered and returned to her local area, whilst the kittens are kept to be socialised and rehomed.

Fostering feral kittens can be very rewarding but also time consuming and hard work. The main duty is socialisation, so a foster carer needs to be at home most of the day and have lots of patience. The length of time it takes to socialise depends entirely on the kitten. If no improvements at all have been made within two weeks then it's important to get in touch with our staff.

You will need to have the space to erect a cat pen for feral kittens in a social area, such as a kitchen or living room. Getting used to being around people and strange noises is all part of the socialising process and the kittens will not improve if they are in a quiet room away from everyone. Without a cage, the kittens will find the nearest hiding place and stay there for the fostering duration! Within the cage, you will also need to provide a hidey bed, litter tray and feeding bowls. You should only need this cage until the kitten starts to gain confidence, although how long this takes will depend on the individual kitten. Garden access is not essential.

Feral kittens are not used to being handled by people, so we must respect that they will be very scared and defensive when approached. As with all stressed cats, approach slowly and begin contact with a feather or similar. Eventually you can work up to stroking them by hand and holding them. When first picking a feral kitten up, try doing it with a towel and stroking the kitten with the edges. Food, as always, is a good way of approaching them and you can use treats to lure them closer to you, trying to encourage them to take the food from your hand.

**Permanent foster: General commitment, until end of life**

On occasion we have cats that we would like to place on permanent foster. These cats may have come to The Mayhew at 15+ years, having spent their entire life living as a loving pet and companion. They are usually overlooked because they are elderly, and may be in need of medical aid. These cats deserve to spend their remaining time in a home environment where they can be given the love and attention they crave and are in need of. Please note, each case is considered on an individual basis and The Mayhew may be of assistance with medical costs.

**If you would like to apply to become a cat foster carer, please request a Cat Fostering Application Form from our Cat Fostering Co-ordinator on 0208 968 2350 or at [catfostering@mayhewanimalhome.org](mailto:catfostering@mayhewanimalhome.org).**