



Foster Care

Handbook



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Welcome to the Meow Family!

A Safe Place for Meow Inc. is a small but mighty not-for-profit cat rescue based in the Northern Territory, helping cats across Darwin, Palmerston, and surrounding areas.

We're all about giving stray, abandoned, and rescued cats a second chance at life by providing them with the love, care, and medical attention they need, including vaccinations, desexing, and microchipping before helping them find their forever homes.

We are proudly **100% volunteer-run**. No fancy offices, no paid staff, just a passionate bunch of cat lovers working together to make a difference.

Thank You for Joining Us!

By becoming a Foster Carer, you're giving a cat a safe place to land while they wait for their forever family.

We literally couldn't do this without you.

Fostering saves lives, and we're so grateful to have you on the team.

About This Handbook

This guide is here to help you understand how fostering works with us. You'll find everything you need to know about caring for your foster cat, what support you can expect, and how we work together to get these cats ready for adoption.

"Saving one cat won't change the world, but for that one cat, the world will change forever."

Unknown



g an ASPFM Foster Carer

It is essential that only registered Foster Carers foster animals for ASPFM. The fostered animals remain the property of ASPFM, and fostering is conducted under the direction of a Volunteer Coordinator.

It is the role of a Coordinator to organise, monitor and record the fostering of animals and to ensure that a high standard of safety is maintained for both carers and animals and that all carers are provided with adequate support and information.

To become a carer for ASPFM you must complete and sign the foster carer application. There are different types of animals for which you can become a foster carer:

- Bottle-fed Babies (0 - 5 weeks) ***required previous experience.***
- Kittens (6 - 24 weeks)
- Kit-Teens (6 - 12 Months)
- Adults (1 year and over)
- Seniors (8 years and over)
- Pregnant/Queen with litter
- Temporary Medical Care (Surgery, medication etc.)
- Ongoing Illness/Special Needs
- Ringworm Carer
- Isolation Carer (All cats coming into our care undertake 2 weeks of isolation away from any other animals)

ASPFM reserves the right to refuse permission to foster and to remove cats or kittens from foster care at any time should it be necessary to do so.

ASPFM Foster Family Network on Facebook

A Facebook page has been set up for foster carers to share photos and good news stories regarding their fosters.

Please be aware that this page is not for you to get medical advice – any advice should be directed to your Coordinator who will liaise with our vet.

Your Coordinator should invite you to join when you become a foster carer. If they don't, please ask them to send you the link to join, as it is a closed Facebook group.



Our Guide to Fostering

We seek safe, loving, and secure home environments where our cats and kittens can receive plenty of attention, handling, and care. This helps ensure that they grow up happy, well-socialised, and ready to find their forever homes. Foster carers play a key role in both the socialising and the health of these animals.

Foster carers don't need to be home all day to care for their kittens but providing love and companionship for a few hours daily is important for their well-being. This ensures they are well-adjusted and with the best chance of finding their perfect home.

Even if you have your own pets and prefer them not to interact with your foster kittens, you can still help! Some carers allow their fosters full access to the house, which greatly helps with socialising, but we understand this isn't always possible. If your resident pets aren't comfortable with visitors, you can still foster if you can provide a safe, restricted area.

For foster carers with their own pets, all resident animals must be desexed, fully vaccinated and have up to date worming. If you have children in your home, we encourage responsible involvement, with parents taking full responsibility for supervision.

What we ask from you:

- Regular updates on the fosters with pictures and information so ASPFM can actively advertise those available for adoption. This can be done through the Foster Family Facebook page or with your coordinator directly.
- Responsive to communications from ASPFM
- Attend vet appointments where required, this can include desexing and vaccinations
- Administer worming treatment when notified by your coordinator or attend our shelter with the cat where the medication will be administered.
- Drop off and collect fosters to Adoption Days when requested by Coordinator
- Hold meet and greets with potential adopters

What we ask you not to do:

- Offer to foster cats on our behalf to members of the Public, we have a structured intake process that we adhere to in bringing cats into our care. We know friends and family may still speak to you about this if you regularly have foster cats in your home so we do try and help where we can.
- Foster animals from other organisations whilst fostering a cat from us due to contagion control and insurance coverage
- Personally advertise foster cats
- Accept payment from adopters for foster cats
- Hold meet and greets with persons unknown to ASPFM
- Hand foster cats to unknown persons without Coordinator approval
- Purchase and/or administer any medications or products to foster cats without Coordinator permission – we provide all medical supplies and medications aligned to Vet advice.



What We Will Provide

Food – We provide dry food for all our cats and kittens. In the event we have excess donations of wet food, this will also be distributed to foster carers. You are welcome to supplement the food supplied with your own food.

Some cats may have specific medical conditions that require a specific prescription diet, which will be provided to you prior to/at the time of handover. Please check with your Coordinator and notify us if you are running low on supply.

Litter - The only thing we are unable to supply is cat litter, we do ask our Foster Carers to provide this for the animals in their care.

Supplies - As a new foster carer, we will provide you with everything you need to get started, including litter trays, bowls and toys. If you need bedding, cat scratchers or anything else at any time, please check with your coordinator in case we have any available.

Medication – All medication will be provided by ASPFM, including regular worming. Your coordinator will provide you with a collection location for worming tablets when the cats are due. If you have any issues with giving tablets, please let your Coordinator know so we can provide support.

Dedicated Coordinator - You can contact your Coordinator for advice or guidance. As we are 100% volunteer run, we cannot guarantee an immediate answer so if you need urgent support, you can contact us on Messenger through our Facebook page where generally someone is able to answer.

Time and Commitment

Caring for foster animals does require commitment and effort. Many of the animals that require fostering have already been through stressful changes, so the carer may be faced with a period of adjustment where the animal, particularly older ones, may be unresponsive or afraid. This is usually overcome with time and patience.

It is important, especially for very young animals, to spend time interacting and playing with people and being cuddled. It is generally in the animal's best interest to stay with the same foster carer until they are permanently rehomed; so, we appreciate that you carefully consider that you have the necessary time before committing to foster caring.

In some cases, due to unforeseen circumstances, it may be necessary for you to return an animal. If this needs to happen, let your Coordinator know as soon as possible so a replacement carer can be found. If you know you will be unavailable at any time (e.g.: going on holidays) please advise your coordinator as holiday care can be provided either at another foster home or in our shelter.

Caring for an animal means that an attachment will be formed. Giving them up, even when you know they are going to loving homes, can be difficult and an emotional experience.

The fostering period can be anywhere from one week to many – each situation is different. Mums with newborn babies rely on finding special foster homes. These carers should be prepared to keep all of them together for approximately five weeks, until mum can return to us while her babies grow on solid food and learn some independence.



Welcoming foster cats or kittens into your home is a wonderful and rewarding experience. A little preparation goes a long way in making sure both you and your foster friends have a smooth and happy time together. Here's how to get ready:

Getting Your Own Pets Ready

If you already have pets at home, it's important to make sure they're healthy and protected:

- Check their vaccinations are up to date.
- Desexing is essential for all resident pets.
- Keep on top of worming treatments to protect everyone.

Setting Up Space for Foster Cats or Kittens

Foster cats are strictly indoor only.

The only exceptions are:

- Cats over 12 weeks old in a secure outdoor enclosure.
- Out on a secure leash with human supervision.

Litter Tray Setup

- Aim for one litter tray per cat or one tray for every two kittens.
- Place litter trays far away from their food, water, and bedding to encourage good toileting habits.

Food & Water Stations

- Provide at least one bowl for water, one for wet food, and one for dry food.
- If you're fostering multiple kittens, it's best to add extra bowls so everyone gets a fair share without having to compete.

Safe Sleeping Spots

Cats love feeling secure! A simple setup like:

- A cat carrier with the door removed.
- A box on its side with a comfy blanket can give them a cozy spot to retreat to, which is especially helpful for shy or nervous fosters.

Toys & Enrichment

To keep your foster cats entertained:

- Offer safe toys that are easy to clean or disposable. These will keep them busy and happy, especially when you're not around to play.

Setting Up Foster Cats

When we have cats or kittens needing foster care, your Coordinator will reach out to check who is available to help.



Your response is important. Whether you can help or not, please reply as soon as possible. Even a quick “No, I can’t this time” helps us plan and manage how many cats we can bring into care.

All cats come into care through our shelter in Palmerston.

Here, they are:

- Checked for obvious health issues
- Glowed for ringworm
- Given a bath and worming treatment

This ensures they are clean, healthy, and ready for their foster homes.

Collecting Your Foster Cats

You’ll usually be asked to pick up your fosters from the Palmerston shelter, 8/7 Rolyat Street, which is next to Palmerston Vets.

If you have any trouble with transport or timing, please chat with your Coordinator — we’re here to help.

Transport Carriers

- We have cat carriers available if you need one for pick-up.
- You’re also welcome to bring your own carrier — just make sure it’s cleaned and ready to go before collection.



ing & Nutrition Information

When you pick up your foster cat (or kittens), we'll chat with you about what food they'll need, how much to give, and how often to feed them. Every cat is different, so we'll make sure you're set up with the right plan.

Bottle Babies (Tiny Tots under 4 weeks)

For the tiniest of kittens, we use Wombaroo formula. Don't worry—we'll give you a separate 'Kitten Feeding Guide' with all the nitty-gritty details if you're taking on bottle babies.

Weaning Kittens (4-6 weeks)

As they transition from bottle to solids, we use Royal Canin kitten mousse. It's gentle, easy to eat, and helps their little tummies adjust to real food.

Kittens under 8 weeks

At this stage, kittens need nutrient-rich kibble and wet food to support their rapid growth. Young kittens have sensitive tummies, so we stick to high-quality food designed for their needs.

Even though supermarket brands might seem tempting (and tasty for cats because of their high salt content), we avoid them for growing kittens. Sometimes, we'll also give you a probiotic to mix in and help support their digestion.

Kittens 8 weeks to 6 months

We'll provide you with high-quality dry food to keep supporting their healthy growth. Wet food isn't essential at this stage, but if you'd like to add some as a treat, you're welcome to!

Fussy Eaters or Worried Carers?

If your foster cat or kitten **refuses to eat**, please don't panic. Just reach out to your **Foster Coordinator**. They'll help figure out if it's a health issue or just a case of a picky eater and guide you on what to do next.

General Feeding Tips:

- Kittens should eat at least twice a day.
- If you're fostering a group of kittens, keep an eye out to make sure everyone is getting their fair share.
- We provide dry food refills, just let your Coordinator know when you're running low.
- Some cats may need special prescription diets for medical reasons. If that's the case, we'll provide that food too. Always give us a heads up if supplies are getting low.
- Please don't change a cat's diet suddenly without checking in with us. Sudden switches can upset their stomachs or worsen medical conditions.



Medical Care

Veterinary Appointments

All our foster cats need to visit the vet before they're ready for adoption. These appointments maintain the health of our cats and prepare them for adoption.

Common Vet Visits for Foster Cats

Initial Health Check - Includes microchipping and first vaccination. This must be done before the cat can be advertised for adoption to ensure they are healthy and safe for new homes.

Second Vaccination - Given 4 - 6 weeks after the first vaccination. This is important to complete the vaccination course to ensure full protection.

Annual Vaccinations - Cats over 12 months require annual boosters to maintain immunity.

Desexing - From 12 weeks of age, provided they are healthy and meet the required weight. Before surgery, kittens will be health checked to confirm they're ready. ASPFM will contact you to arrange a suitable appointment.

Scheduling Appointments

We'll always work with you to find suitable times for vet visits. If you have any concerns about transport or availability, just let your Coordinator know.

Medical advice and Assistance

Caring for foster cats is a team effort, and we're here to support you when medical concerns arise. We work with a network of veterinary clinics for consultations, treatments, and medications.

When Your Foster Cat is Unwell

We understand it can be stressful when a foster cat becomes sick - you're not alone, and we're here to help.

Non-Emergency & Long-Term Health Issues.

Some common non-urgent concerns include:

- **Respiratory:** sneezing, coughing
- **Eye issues:** red, sore, or weepy eyes
- **Skeletal:** limping or signs of discomfort
- **Gastrointestinal:** vomiting, diarrhea, reduced appetite
- **Urinary:** difficulty urinating or unusual behaviour
- **Skin concerns:** hair loss, lumps, excessive grooming, torn nails

What To Do

If you notice any of these symptoms, please:

- **Contact your Coordinator as soon as possible.** They will assess the situation and advise you on the next steps.
- You'll be supported through any treatment needed - you're never expected to handle it alone.
- For **emergencies** or if you're unsure if it's urgent, always err on the side of caution and reach out to your Coordinator straight away.



Emergency Conditions – What to Do

Some health issues need urgent attention. If you notice any of the following emergency symptoms, please act immediately:

- Suspected fractures (limping with possible broken bone)
- Severe vomiting or diarrhea, especially if there's blood
- Dehydration (skin stays tented when pinched, sunken eyes)
- Open-mouth breathing (sign of breathing distress)
- Male cats with urinary issues (straining, unable to urinate)
- Sudden lethargy (extreme tiredness, not responsive)
- Abdominal pain (crying when touched, tense belly)
- Unconsciousness or collapse

What To Do in an Emergency

Contact your Coordinator immediately and send a message to our Facebook page so we can act quickly and follow the instructions provided - we will guide you on getting urgent veterinary help.

When in Doubt – Always Reach Out

If you're unsure whether something is an emergency, it's always better to ask.



t and Greet

We will contact you if we have received interest in a cat in your care and will provide you with the details to contact and arrange a suitable time for them to meet the cat in your home.

We will never provide your details to the potential adopter directly.

At the meeting here are a couple of things to let the potential adopter know to get the best out of their time:

- **Encourage them to sit at the cats' level if possible** - size may be intimidating to a cat and this can help eliminate some of the cat's initial fears.
- **Get them to give the cat their hand** – reaching a hand toward the cat allows the cat to come to the potential adopter. Generally, they will sniff, rub, and decide what the next step is.
- **Encourage them to let the cat make the first move and go slow.** When people are overly excited (particularly children!) this can create anxiety in the cat. Let the cat determine the pace of the interaction.
- **Don't let them stare at the Cat** - For cats, staring is a sign of aggression. Offering the cat long, slow blinks, which translates to "I mean you no harm." The cat may reciprocate the blinks.
- **Don't be afraid to tell them about the cat** – you know this cat the best so tell them about the cats' personality, likes and dislikes. We always encourage finding the right match for the adopter.
- **If the cat doesn't want to interact, don't force it.** - The cat might simply not want to meet or interact, and we encourage it to be on their terms so be patient.

The potential adopter may ask you about the adoptions process – all questions should be directed back to the coordinator, and we do not expect you to respond to these questions.

After the meeting, the coordinator will contact them to find out how the meeting went and if they want to proceed with an application to adopt. The application is assessed within 24 hours of receipt with the coordinator confirming the next steps.

Saying Goodbye to a Foster Cat

Saying goodbye to foster animals can be tough, particularly for the first few, but most foster parents also say that the rewards of giving animals another chance in life far outweigh the pain of parting. And of course, there are always plenty of other kittens and cats waiting to fill their space!

Fostered animals must be returned at the agreed time to the shelter or to the adopter once your coordinator has confirmed they are able to collect the cat from you.

If you plan on continuing to foster, hold on to the food and supplies you received from us. We do encourage you to spray with Safe4 (available from the shelter) to fully sanitise the area before introducing your next foster cat.