CS-14 WORKING CAT PROGRAM

**Purpose**

To define the process of placing cats that are not suitable for standard adoption, into outdoor environments with shelters and then placement with adopters as working cats

**Policy**

Candidates for this program include cats with poor litter box habits, behavioral issues that make them incompatible with indoor living, feral or semi-feral backgrounds, histories of living outdoors or indoor/outdoors. HSWM will only adopt out working cats to adopters with adequate shelter and the willingness to acclimate the cat to their location.

**Staff /Areas Affected**

Customer Service Staff

Feline Behavior Coordinator

Customer Service Staff

**Definitions**

**ShelterLuv** – Database used by HSWM for all tracking of customers, animals and associated service

**CS** – Customer Service staff

**WCP** – Working Cat Program

**Working Cat Adoption Application** – not completed in ShelterLuv, but a Jot Form. <https://form.jotform.com/202465423096151> This will create an email notification that is sent to the appropriate staff member.

**Responsibilities**

* Cats will be identified as working cats by behavior staff.
* Adoption packets will be put together by animal care staff.
* Adoption consultations will be done by the Feline Behavior Coordinator or Director of Animal Care. WCP consults are very different from a typical cat consult, details below.
* Adoptions are processed by Customer Service staff.

**Procedures**

1. Cats will be evaluated by behavior staff. If they are determined to be candidates for the WCP, they will be identified as such.
2. These animals will not be moved to the adoption floor. They will be kept in the med room.
3. Adoption packets for these animals will be put together by animal care staff.
4. Potential adopters will be directed to the Feline Behavior Coordinator or Director of Animal Care who will conduct a consult with them.
5. Working Cat applications that come in via the on line link will be reviewed by the Feline Behavior Coordinator or designate.
6. When someone is interested in a working cat, customer service will transfer/forward to the Feline Behavior Coordinator or Director of Animal Care.
7. It is very important to look at the address on the application on Google Maps satellite to confirm they are not on a busy road.
8. WCP cats must go out in pairs, to increase the likelihood that they will stay in the adopter’s area.  When individuals are sent out, statics from our program, there has not been one instance when a single cat was sent, and they remained in the owner’s area after release. They likely have become lost or prey. For a positive adoption experience and the case for ongoing welfare, unsocial cats should be adopted in pairs. (Similar to aliens, if you were abducted, wouldn’t you feel a little better if there was another human on the spaceship with you?) Provide these details and encourage the adopter that two will be far more successful than one.
9. Working cats MUST have ALL CLAWS. Cats with any declawed paws cannot defend as needed in a working cat program.
10. Adopters much have a physical structure (garage, barn, shed, etc.) for the cat to access. A standalone dog house, cat shelter or under a porch is not acceptable. This is extremely important for keeping the cat in the as well as protection from predators and inclement weather.
11. Each of these animals will be spayed/neutered, microchipped, and up-to-date on vaccinations.
12. Adopters will be briefed on the acclimation process, and will then set up a time to pick up their animal. See the end of this document for these details, which can be copied and emailed.
13. Adoption processing is done by customer service staff. Working cats are always fee waived.

**Reference Documents**

SOP AC- 12 Cat Care Processes

SOP AC-16 Working Cat Care

**Revision History**

V1 - Created 3/8/16

V2 - Revised 5/19/16

V3 - Revised 11/27/18

V4 - Revised 5/20/19

V5 – Revised 11/17/20

Thanks for your interest in our working cats.

We adopt these cats out in pairs because relocation is much more successful when they go through the experience with a buddy. Through follow-ups we've found that singly adopted working cats almost never stick around after the acclimation period. They take solace in each other and they huddle together for warmth.

For additional protection against frigid conditions, It is recommend to place an outdoor cat shelter inside their home base, such as the detached garage, barn or shed. They are easy to make out of plastic storage totes, styrofoam and straw. There are also tutorials on YouTube and here are some of our favorites: <https://www.alleycat.org/resources/how-to-build-an-outdoor-shelter/>

Our working cat program is a way to save the lives of cats who can't be adopted into traditional home settings. Typically, this means they haven't been socialized to people (but they make great mousers!). If you're worried about them being aggressive, no need! These cats are afraid of people and prefer to avoid you. As long as you provide hiding spots, they will choose to hide rather than confront you as they acclimate. We can't guarantee it, but sometimes they warm up and become friendly once they get used to you. We also have working cat adopters who love watching their outdoor cats and develop a special relationship with them despite not being able to pet them.

It's critical for their survival that working cats be confined to a crate inside the garage for the first 2-4 weeks. If you don't have a large-sized dog crate, we may be able to lend one depending on availability. I've included information about relocating outdoor cats below. Please read it in full and if you are still interested, please email to confirm or let us know if you have any questions. We can then discuss next steps.

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**Relocating Working Cats**

Upon arrival at new location, cats must be confined in a crate for 2-4 weeks (2 weeks is minimal, 4 is weeks optimal for a higher chance that they will stick around.)

This confinement period is crucial for helping cats acclimate to the sights, smells, sounds, people, and other animals in their environment. If simply set free upon arrival, cats will run away and may die as a result of being lost in unfamiliar territory.

The acclimation crate should have a cardboard box in the back for them to hide in and their food, water and litter box in the front. Covering the crate with a towel or blanket can help them feel safer. In the winter months, covering the crate with a thick blanket and using straw as bedding can insulate.

These may be unsocial cats, so handling can result in injury. Transfer each cat by placing the carrier opening inside the crate, then opening the carrier door. Wait until the cat goes into the cardboard box to hide before slowly removing the carrier and closing the crate door.

Before attending to, make sure building is secure and doors are closed in case cats bolt.

**Acclimation**

During the acclimation period, only adults should care for the cats.

Avoid loud noises in their area during the acclimation period. Never force interaction. The safer the cats feel, the more likely they are to stick around.

Prepare for a mess! The crate gets messy during acclimation. Don't worry about cleaning it perfectly.

Provide fresh food and water at the same time every day. This teaches the cat that there is a regular food source on a predictable schedule. Talk to the cats in a soft voice each time you bring food. Providing some canned food, treats, or tuna in addition to kibble can help them learn to trust you. Scoop the litter boxes daily.

At the end of the confinement period, nonchalantly leave the crate door open for them to exit and re-enter at their own pace.

After releasing, continue providing fresh food and water daily. Cats cannot live on mice alone and feeding them won't affect their instinct to hunt.

Cats usually return to the crate to sleep for the first week or two, so leave it up and open for that duration.

Make sure cats are able to get into their building AT ALL TIMES for protection from the elements and from predators.

If you have any questions at all, please contact us!