

Save a kitten this holiday season

Oshkosh Area Humane Society seeks foster homes for influx of felines

By Katie Pulvermacher
pulvek45@uwosh.edu

The Oshkosh Area Humane Society (OAHS) refers to the warm and moderate-weather months when most cats have their babies as Kitten Season. Because of climate change, Kitten Season, which usually goes from May to September, is now going into October and November. This means lots of kittens need homes.

"It's only natural that when spring arrives, we start to see an influx of cats and kittens," OAHS Education and Communications Coordinator Cheryl Rosenthal said. "It seems especially in the colder weather, people are finding cats and their kittens in their garage, in their wood pile and under their car."

OAHS was originally under the jurisdiction of the Oshkosh Police Department. In 1990, the first Executive Director, Joni Geiger, wrote a letter to the editor because she was very unhappy with how the local 2,600-square-foot animal shelter was being run.

"She found out after writing this article that seven other people felt the same way that she did and they formed an organization called Friends of the Shelter," Rosenthal said. "This non-profit organization group of animal-loving people started doing bake sales and raffles and raised money for the shelter."

After about a year, the city of Oshkosh came to the organization and told them to take over the shelter. The name of OAHS came in 1998. The team felt limited by the small shelter and purchased a 13,000 square-foot building from OAHS monies, annual interest and capital campaign funds.

"We are a non-profit organization; we work very closely with the police department, we have a contract with the city of Oshkosh to take in strays and we also have a budget contract,"



Katie Pulvermacher / Advance-Titan
UWO third-year Margaret Villagomez fosters three kittens from the Oshkosh Area Humane Society. Jane, Abby and Natalia keep her very busy.

Rosenthal said. "We receive about \$95,000 a year from the city for that contract; however, our operating cost at the shelter is currently \$1.7 million."

A huge help in operation comes from foster homes.

"People should foster simply because it allows the Oshkosh Area Humane Society

and the community to save more homeless pets," Rosenthal said. "It's

very beneficial to certain animals that shouldn't be in a shelter environment, like nursing moms. A shelter is not a good environment to raise healthy, strong kittens."

OAHS Cat Foster Coordinator Alaska Burroughs said some kittens come into the shelter after facing difficulty.

"A lot of people want the friendly, healthy kittens, but in reality, we

don't get a lot of those in," Burroughs said. "There are certainly quite a few of them, but we more so need fosters for the undersocialized ones, the pregnant or nursing moms, bottle babies and the medical and recovery ones."

Both Rosenthal and Burroughs have fostered kittens and cats.

"I have fostered many, many cats," Rosenthal said. "I've had moms with kittens, kittens with no mom, a single kitten who had been abandoned, I've fostered dogs. One of the most important things I have found is you really do have to have enough time to juggle."

Burroughs said her fostering experiences have all been different.

"I started fostering before I started working here," Burroughs said. "When I started working here, I started doing progressively harder cats. I did a mom cat with nine kittens. It was a lot. I did behavioral cats and I have kittens right now."

OAHS asks that foster homes keep their personal pets separate from their fostering animals.

"With little kittens, they're coming from outside and they can seem perfectly healthy when we send them out into foster," Burroughs said. "Then, a week or two later they're really sick with a lowered immune system from being outside and in the shelter. We don't want that given to your resident pet, which is why we recommend separating [personal pets from fosters]."

UW Oshkosh third-year Margaret Villagomez came across fostering on the Humane Society's website and is fostering three kittens: Jane, Abby and Natalia.

"I wanted to adopt, but I wasn't ready to

commit to a cat yet," Villagomez said. "They're always in need of fosters, so I signed up and a week later I was able to get three kittens."

Villagomez said the experience has been great, despite the kittens spending the whole day sleeping and being energetic at night.

"These little creatures keep me very busy at night," Villagomez said. "I would recommend fostering to anyone thinking about getting an animal, because then you will really experience what it's like to have them in your home. Or even if you aren't thinking about adopting, it's a good way to have an animal at least for a little while and provide them a home with no expenses."

OAHS provides litter, cat food, litter bins, dishes, toys, scratching posts (if available) and veterinary care.

"The great thing about fostering is they pay for [almost] everything," Villagomez said. "It is free and you just get to live with [the cats]."

Burroughs said it's important to understand the commitment you're getting into when fostering.

"Before fostering, you should consider that you need quite a bit of time to focus on the animals out of your schedule," Burroughs said. "If any emergency occurs, you would have to be able to be here at any time of the day to make sure that they get the care that they need."

Rosenthal said with COVID-19, a lot of people don't recognize that there's a shortage of veterinary care. With our economy the way it is, people are finding that they can't afford a vet, they can't get in to see the vet and animals that would normally be spayed and neutered haven't been.

"I want to make sure that it's understood

that this situation is not unique to Oshkosh, Wisconsin," Rosenthal said. "This is something that is happening nationwide right now. There's more animals than there are homes."

Rosenthal said there's a lot to know about cat behavior and OAHS isn't expecting foster homes to know everything.

"If you find out 'Oh gosh, I really don't know quite what I'm doing,' call us," Rosenthal said. "We will help you learn."

Ultimately, OAHS wants fostering to be a family decision because it's such a big commitment.

"It's very rewarding, but it also can be very time consuming," Rosenthal said. "It's fun having kittens, but I'm not going to lie, it's also a lot of work. [Foster homes help] us save lives and they're making a big difference for these animals."

