

Barn Cat 101:

Starting a Barn Cat Program in your Community



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Monica Frenden

Monica Frenden noticed the stark lack of resources for community cats in rural Illinois and decided to do something about it. In 2008, Monica founded a trap-neuter-return organization that sterilized thousands of cats called Safe House Animal Rescue League. To further reduce euthanasia, she then pioneered one of the nation's first, and largest, barn cat programs. In 2012, Monica moved to Texas and joined Austin Pets Alive! where she serves as Cat Program Manager. Since 2012, Monica has led her team to a 40% growth in cat adoptions, helped Austin achieve a citywide 98% live release rate for cats, and oversees the adoption and care of nearly 4,000 cats each year. Her passion for improving the country's sheltering systems for cats and love of sassy cats helps save even the most challenging of felines.



From Community Cat to Barn Cat

Community cats are defined as any cat that is not owned. This could include feral cats roaming around the neighborhood to cats that have several people leaving food and water out for them. These cats originate from people who abandon their pet cats, to a pet cat that gets lost, or part of a litter of 2nd, 3rd or more generations of feral cats. You can find community cats in suburban neighborhoods, near dumpsters, near food establishments or shopping centers. In general community cats can live in any area that can provide shelter and a food source. Many community cats get cared for by people in their neighborhood, who are kind enough to leave out food or water, although there is a percentage of community cats that survive solely on their own. Overall, community cats are often well adjusted and potentially productive members of a community. The biggest problem that community cats face, as a whole, is overpopulation.

There are several different methods for helping to control the overpopulation of community cats in neighborhoods. By far and large the most popular and effective method is the Trap, Neuter, Return (TNR) method. This method has been proven time and again to be the most effective and least stressful method of reducing the populations of community cats. In this method shelters or rescues trap community cats, spay/ neuter them, microchip, ear tip, and vaccinate the cats then release them back into the neighborhood they were found.

Returning cats to the area they were taken from should always be the first option for community cats. Relocating the cats should never be your first option. Still, there are times when returning the cats is not a possibility. These situations often arise from one or more of the reasons listed below:

- The area in which the cats came from is now uninhabitable or a dangerous habitat
- The shelter the cats were brought to has a no return policy
- The area the cat came from is unknown

The cats who cannot be returned and are not suited for traditional adoption are the most at risk to be euthanized and often have no other option than relocation once they are impounded. This population of cats is what inspired rescue and shelter organizations to start barn cat programs. Barn cat programs are still relatively new to the animal rescue industry. Essentially a Barn Cat Program is a program in which shelters or rescues attempt to relocate these cats to different barns, warehouses or other privately owned areas that provide a safe area for the cats to roam that includes shelter, food and water. These places, while more stressful for the cat initially then returning the cat to its previous neighborhood, allow them to comfortably live out their lives in a safe environment.

Getting Started

You have noticed that most of the community, or feral, cats that enter your local shelter end up being euthanized and you want to do something about it. Great! This manual will cover the basics on starting up and running a Barn Cat Program in your organization or improving upon an existing program. To begin with, here are a few recommendations on the supplies you will need, budget friendly housing options, and tips on convincing your board to start up a Barn Cat Program.

Convincing your board

You may find yourself in the position of having to convince your board, or rescue group, to start a barn cat program. After all, there are so many cats who need rescue, why start a new program just for feral cats?

- **Their Lives Matter**-The most raw and basic of answers is that their lives matter, too. Just because barn cats do not want to snuggle with you doesn't mean they aren't deserving of our time and efforts.
- **High Demand for Barn Cats**- Why would we *not* save cats who have adopters lining up to adopt them? No matter what part of the country you are in, rescues around the country have shown that there is a great market for barn cat adoptions. With many shelters, APA! included, often running a wait list for adopters when demand exceeds supply.
- **Community Support**- Barn cat programs tend to have huge community support and are media darlings. This is a program the public understands easily and sees value in. After all, every farm or ranch, anyone has ever spent time in, had a resident barn cat, didn't it? It is very easy to achieve press and community engagement for barn cat programs - things any rescue could use more of.
- **Inexpensive!** – A barn cat program is likely to be the least expensive program at a shelter and can yield huge numbers of adoptions. You get a lot of 'bang for your buck' with barn cat programs, and all boards love to hear that!

Barn Cat Programs are the ultimate trifecta: low investment, huge life-saving impact, and the community loves it. Even with a very minimum budget, Barn Cat programs are able to save hundreds of lives annually and build community support. It is a win-win for your board, your rescue, and the cats!

Getting Started- Recommended Supplies

- **Feral Cat Dens** – You will need one per cat that you are currently housing in a traditional shelter condo. (See other housing options below) These make housing less stressful for the cat, and much safer for staff. Each den is approximately \$80. You can purchase these [here](#) or enter "Feral Cat Den" in Google for more retailers. These are well worth the investment.
 - If these are not in your budget, we recommend using small cat carriers instead, and using a reaching device/stick to close the carrier door before opening the shelter condo.
- **Feral Cat Net** – These are highly recommended if you need to capture cats from an open enclosure but also handy in case of escapes inside the shelter. The recommended net is the [Freeman Cage Net for \\$108](#).
 - Fishing nets can be used as an alternative but the rough nylon mesh can injure cats and are easier to escape from. Look for a mesh net with cinch capabilities.

- [XTEND MAX Datamars Microchip Scanner](#) - Not essential, but it makes scanning feral cats much less stressful and safer. This scanner has the ability to scan through plastic carriers so no close contact is needed!
- [Bite resistant gloves](#) – Mandatory- While you should aim to handle feral cats as little as possible, there will be times you should have protective gloves on. A full Kevlar sleeve, up to the elbow, and a leather hand, to keep some dexterity with a fair amount of protection, is recommended. (\$50-150).
 - A less expensive option is welding gloves, though these offer no dexterity.
- **Litter boxes**- The most inexpensive, disposable option is dish pans from the local Dollar Store.
- **Bedding**- Nothing fancy is required. Old sheets and towels make good use as feral cat bedding. If housing the cats in the shelter or in a wire kennel, cover the entire kennel with a donated sheet to reduce stress.
- **Snuggle Safe Discs**- If you are located in cold climate areas, [Snuggle Safe Discs](#) are helpful to put in at night to provide extra warmth in the winter. These are typically not required if the cats have a hutch, insulated house, or good basic shelter from the elements and/ or companions to stay warm with.

****Do Not Buy****- Under no conditions should a neck grabber device or catch pole EVER be used. Never ever, do not buy, do not consider using, ever.

Getting Started- Housing Options

A more in depth section on the recommended housing options can be found later on in this manual. Below is a list of budget friendly housing options (both indoor and outdoor) that can help get you started.

- Outdoor:
 - **Chicken coops** make excellent feral cat habitats. Check Craigslist for inexpensive or free coops or see if one can be donated to you!
 - **Build an enclosure**- Simple, small enclosures can also be made with basic lumber and hardware cloth, chicken wire, or wire horse fence. Make sure no fencing spaces exceed 2", cats can escape a 3" hole or greater as well as easily push or bend metal or plastic fencing. Make sure the enclosure has a floor. Cats can dig out to escape.
 - **Prebuilt enclosures**- If you find yourself overrun with money, you can always purchase prebuilt [outdoor cat habitats](#).
- Indoor:
 - **Traditional Crates**- 42" or larger wire crates can accommodate a Feral Cat Den (or Hidey Box) and 1-2 feral cats. The most inexpensive option is to reuse these old crates which have become too unsightly for adoption events; otherwise, [they can be purchased](#) for around \$65.

Determining a Cat's Eligibility

Cats that should be considered for intake into a barn cat program should meet the following criteria:

- Unsuitable for Traditional Adoption
- Unable to be returned to the location he/she was captured
- Healthy
- Reasonably Capable of Colony Life

Unsuited for Traditional Adoption

The primary cat that fits in this category is a feral, un-socialized cat, who is beyond the age of socialization. They can also include cats who are friendly but miserable indoors (not suited as a household cat), cats who are incontinent or have litter box issues that cannot be resolved, and cats who have lengthy bite histories or extreme behavior issues that cannot be resolved through medical or behavioral modification.

Unable to be returned to the Location it was captured:

This category includes cats who arrive at a shelter that does not permit returning the cats back to where they came from as well as cats whose habitat is no longer safe or there is no record of where the cat came from.

Healthy

All cats entering a barn cat program should be fully vetted. Here are a few recommendations:

- Ensure they are sterilized
 - Perform spay/ neuter surgery if needed
- Vaccinate for FVRCP and Rabies
- Microchip
- Deworm
- Flea preventative

It is not recommended to test community cats for FIV/FelV prior to placement as a Barn Cat. For more information on this, please reference the following links:

- <http://www.alleycat.org/Page.aspx?pid=458>
- http://www.neighborhoodcats.org/HOW_TO_RELEASEING_FIV_FELV_POSITIVE_CATS

Capable of Colony Life

There are not any strict rules regarding the ages of the cats accepted into a barn cat program or strict rules on what may disqualify them. Instead, it is recommended to look at each cat as an individual and work to find a suitable solution for that cat. The cat should be able to survive in a managed colony situation where food and shelter are provided.

There are many suggestions regarding which cats must always be ineligible for barn placement such as declawed cats, kittens, or cats with disabilities. Instead of outright denying these cats, try and think outside the box. For example, declawed cats, once slated for euthanasia due to temperament or bite histories, have been placed in warehouse jobs where they are in a safe, inside, environment and are still useful as a deterrent to mice and other rodents. Kittens should be socialized if possible however, if the kitten is beyond socialization or extensive fostering is not an option, an extra safe barn home, especially when the kitten is placed with older cats, is a better fate than euthanasia at the shelter. Likewise, tripod feral cats and other cats with disabilities have been placed at carefully selected locations, where they have minimal risk of predation and a committed caretaker. Searching for the unique adoption location that meets the cat's individual needs is all that is required.

Determining a Cat's Temperament: Feral or Frightened?

Nearly every cat who is trapped and brought into an animal control facility can appear feral. Determining the cat's true temperament is as much an art as a skill, but there are some tell-tale signs to look for in a truly feral cat:

- **Silent-** Feral cats, in general, do not talk to you. If they are meowing at you then they probably are not feral. Most feral cats are silent.
- **Avoiding Interaction-** Feral cats may avoid eye contact and bury their heads into or under an object in their crate to hide from you. A feral cat wants nothing more than to be hidden from you. Staying still and silent is a common defense when caged.
- **"Airplane ears"-** Ears are low and wide against their head.
- **Body Position-** A feral cat's body position is usually low and wide, as if they are trying to form a puddle. They may also be hunched into a ball to protect their body, tail tucked under. In an animal control cage, a cat lounging on her side, out in the open, with feet comfortably outstretched is not feral. A cat sitting with front feet tucked under is confident in their environment. An impounded feral cat will not tuck their front feet under as they are always anticipating danger and feeling the need for escape.
- **Disinterest-** Feral cats are not interested in interacting with you, toys, or bedding. They will not curiously investigate items in their crate at animal control and may not eat. They will not show interest in common sounds (a can opening, 'kitty kitty' noises).
- **Escape Attempts-** Especially if a hiding box is not placed in their cage, a feral cat may shake, climb the walls, bounce off the walls, try to get through the bars, or bloody their nose.
- **Time-** This is a luxury that may not always be afforded, but, if possible, give every impounded cat a few days to calm down and allow their true personality to come out before deciding they are feral. It is recommended to make your own temperament analysis of each cat and not immediately accept the analysis of another.

- **Wand toy test-** With a long wand toy inserted through the cage bars, you can try softly stroking the cat on its back. Most feral cats will remain still but flinch every time the wand touches them, or they may squirm further into a corner trying to get away from it. A friendly but frightened cat will usually show subtle signs of enjoying the caress, will turn to look at you, make eye contact, meow, or even move closer. If in doubt, repeat the wand test a few times daily and see if progress is being made.
- **Aggressive Behavior** – Sometimes the cat who hisses, growls, lashes out, or attacks is not feral at all, but rather a house cat unhappy with their situation. Nonetheless, if the cat is unreasonably aggressive after being allowed time to acclimate, their rescue options are likely very limited and should be considered for the barn cat program due to temperament.

Still having trouble spotting the truly feral cat? Here are a few extra tips:

- Many experienced feral cat trappers can spot a truly feral cat at 50 feet. Contact your best local trapper and ask for tips on identifying impounded feral cats, or ask him or her to accompany you to the shelter to help teach you.
- In a high kill shelter, there is often not much time to make an appropriate analysis of the cat. Even with years of experience, barn cat programs have the occasional “feral” cat who becomes friendly almost immediately upon exiting the shelter, or who becomes friendly once at their new home. If the cat becomes friendly while still in the programs custody, they can be transferred into a traditional pet adoption program. If the cat becomes friendly once they are at the new farm home, they are thriving there, and the farm wants to keep them there is no reason to not allow the cat to stay at that adoptive farm home. If the farm is not interested in a friendly outdoor cat and wants a truly feral cat, you can easily recover the cat and place them into a traditional pet adoption program. You will pull feral cats who become friendly and should have a contingency plan in place for them.

Here are a few example photos of impounded cats that were considered for barn cat placement. Please note that appearance is only one factor in determining temperament, each cat should still be assessed by trying to interact with them and giving them time to relax.

Ears are back, pupils large, tail tucked, trying to hide.



Ears are back, pupils large, tucked down, trying to hide



Very alert, threatened appearance. His eyes say he is very concerned about the cameraman.



Head buried, ears flat, refusal to make eye contact. No interest in his bedding, just wants to be invisible.



Ears back, large pupils, but front right foot is tucked underneath, he is sitting on his bed and somewhat forward in his cage. Evaluate further: very possibly just scared/angry but friendly.



Very large pupils, ears back, trying to get as far into the corner as possible to avoid interaction.



Smashed into the far back corner, balled up, pupils very large, hackles raised, very confused and frightened look.



Ears flat against head, huge pupils, sunk down against the floor, defensive posturing. Food spilled due to thrashing in cage.



Barn Cat Housing

Always try and get cats from animal control to their new farm home as quickly as possible in order to minimize cage time, which is very stressful on under socialized cats. Here is a proposed timeline once a cat has been selected for a Barn Cat Program.

- **First 48 hours:**
 - Spay / Neuter surgery
 - Vaccination
 - Ear tipping
 - Any other needed medical services
 - After surgery, the cat is placed into a relocation crate for recovery
- **Up to 72 hours:** As soon as they are recovered from sterilization and are given medical release, deliver the cats to their new homes if available/ possible.

During their recovery period, and until an adoptive home is found for them, the barn cats should be kept in a separate, quiet area from the rest of the shelter to reduce stress. There are several options for housing the cats during this period. Below are a few examples of housing that has been used at other organizations. Choose housing that works for your organization and don't be afraid to think outside the box.

Relocation Crate Method

Once cats have undergone any medical procedures that are necessary they are placed in fully outfitted relocation crates (see below for how to set up a relocation crate) which they will ultimately be delivered in. This is to minimize handling, transfer, and stress on the cats. The crates are placed in a separate quiet area of the shelter and are fully covered, again to minimize stress and to help prevent disease transfer.

While they are housed at the shelter, every effort should be made to minimize stress upon the cats by providing them quiet space away from barking dogs and human traffic. A trained staff member should be in charge of caring for them to minimize the risk of the cats escaping their crates and to minimize the risk of bites or scratches to well-intentioned caregivers who may not be familiar with handling unsocial cats.

A 'Hidey Box' is essential to sheltering feral cats in any type of crate. Not only will this reduce stress on the cat by giving the cat a place to hide, but a Hidey Box prevents the cat from darting out the crate when cleaning or providing food. TruCatch Feral Cat Dens (pictured below) are my preferred Hidey Box for use inside the shelter, while awaiting transfer. These plastic boxes can be safely closed up with the cat inside for easy crate cleaning while avoiding all physical contact with the cat.



Shown with open porthole (inset).

The TruCatch Feral Cat Den can be purchased at animal-traps.com

Setting up the Relocation Crate

The relocation crates are donated dog crates or crates in your organization that have become too unsightly to continue using for adoption events. Black wire crates, like the popular Midwest series, or plastic airline crates like you would use to fly a dog will both work. The plastic airline crates are preferable however as they afford a little more privacy, block wind in the winter months, and are harder for kittens to escape from.

No matter what crate you use, it should be large enough to humanely house two adult cats. A 42" or larger Midwest crate does nicely.



A relocation crate and an adult male chocolate lab to show scale

The crate should be lined with newspaper or bedding. In the winter months, it is helpful to put down a few inches of straw for added warmth.

In a back corner of the crate, insert a "Hidey Box." The Hidey Box is where the frightened cats will sleep and hide. Put soft bedding inside the Hidey Box for the cats to nest in and make sure the box is big enough to accommodate two adult cats. The Hidey Box can be a broken cat carrier with a door removed or tied open, the discarded top to a covered litter box, a cardboard box, or even a plastic bucket turned on its side. If you have unlimited funds, Tru Catch Feral Cat Dens (pictured above) or Hide-Perch-and-Go boxes are excellent for this as well.

The opening to the Hidey Box should face the opposite side of the crate. This is so that when cleaning and feeding the relocation crate the cats aren't able to see the person cleaning. If the cats cannot see what the person is doing with the crate door open, they are not bothered and will stay inside the Hidey Box simply hoping the person will go away as quickly as possible. However, if the Hidey Box faced the person cleaning, the cats would be confronted head-on, possibly feel like they are being encroached upon, and are more likely to rush past to escape.

In the front of the crate, right up against the door, place a litter pan. Opposite the litter pan, place a food dish. Try and get the food as far away from the litter as possible, but still easily within reach of the door to the crate.

**Tip - Litter boxes for relocation can be dish pans from the dollar store or donated deep, round bed pans from hospitals. The best food dishes are the plastic rectangle side-by-side, attached food/water bowls since these fit the best in confined spaces. Plastic cottage cheese/sour cream containers also work well and are free!*

If using a wire crate, make sure to cover the entire relocation crate with an old sheet, save a couple of inches for fresh airflow. In winter, cover the crate in heavy blankets to conserve heat. In the summer, leave at least one side of the crate uncovered for ventilation.



Once the crate is set up, add the cats. Transferring from a live trap is the easiest. Simply open the crate door, put the trap inside as far as possible and aim it toward the Hidey Box. Put your body up against the gap in the open crate door so the cats do not see a wide path to freedom. Then open the trap guillotine and gently encourage the cat into the Hidey Box. Repeat with the second cat.

***Here are some photo examples of how to safely transfer a cat from a live trap into a couple different types of carriers/ cages:*



It is best to deliver the barn cats inside the relocation crates which have been previously set up, and which the cats have already been living in for a few days. Downfall to this means you will need a van or SUV to deliver. Upside is this is less stressful on the cats and the cats can be safely transferred from trap to crate *inside an organizations shelter building*, not on location at a farm where an escape would be disastrous.

APA! (Austin Pets Alive) Method for Housing Feral Cats

APA uses both outdoor, free-roaming enclosures for barn cats (blueprints for these enclosure can be found in your tool kit), as well as isolated condo space inside the shelter when needed. The dedicated outdoor habitats are always preferential, as housing feral cats in shelter cages is extremely stressful on them, but there are times when a barn cat must be isolated in a shelter cage.

At the shelter, feral cats are housed in a quiet, secluded area of the shelter. When in a shelter cage, the feral cat always has a "feral cat den" inside the cage. This gives the cat a safe hiding place to rest, and also allows us to easily close the den for ease of cleaning and feeding without stress to the cat, or risk of injury to staff. They are given an extra deep litter box, if possible, as caged feral cats are very likely to make a great deal of mess. We provide these cats with a grocery store, inexpensive cat kibble as cats are prone to stop eating under stress, and these foods are typically much more enticing than the healthier brand we feed to the other cat populations. Wet food is fed twice per day, as well, also an inexpensive 'junk food' variety. The cage is labeled with a kennel card indicating the cat is feral, so any staff are aware not to attempt to touch or handle the cat inside. If the cat is particularly stressed, the cage front will be covered with a towel to eliminate frightening stimulus.

In our outdoor barn cat enclosures, cats are kept in one of four large group habitats. Each habitat has ample places to hide and sleep, places to perch, and food, water, litter areas. Our habitats are under large trees for shade, protected from direct sun, and are located in an off-limits, private area of the shelter which is quiet and calm and free from all but non-essential personnel. Enrichment items like tree limbs for scratching, bedding, etc are inside each enclosure and the surrounding area provides ample nature watching opportunity for the cats. Each enclosure has one or more feeding stations where kibble is available 24/7, and wet food is fed once per day. Minimally invasive health checks are performed twice per week, in which staff ensures we see every cat inside and they appear to be in good weight, do not appear ill, etc.

Finding Barn Cat Adopters

The term “Barn Cat” can be largely used symbolically. While the greatest percentage of cats from barn cat programs are placed with rural farm properties, there are an infinite number of other locations that are suitable and interested in adopting barn cats:

- Warehouses
- Junkyards
- Auto repair shops
- Woodworking shops
- Wineries
- Stables
- Grain handling facilities
- Greenhouses / Nurseries / Garden Centers
- Churches
- Storage facilities

A huge variety of businesses have rodent control issues and can be appealed to that saving the life of a working cat will not only reduce their rodent problems, but will do so organically, without the use of poisons or inhumane rodent traps. This will be good PR for them, will save them money on exterminator fees, and is typically embraced by employees who often take on the responsibility of feeding and caring for the new workplace mascots.

Here are a few suggested advertising techniques to get you started:

- **Website-** Make sure your website advertises your barn cat program and have a convenient online application for interested adopters to complete. Several free form builders are available online (i.e. Jotform, FormSite).
- **Newspapers-** Demographics show that rural populations rely more heavily on newspapers than urban residents. Try running weekly ads in several newspapers. Ask the editor if they can run your ad for free or at a discounted rate in any extra space they might have.
- **Quarterly “Farm Reports”-** These are targeted catalogs distributed to area farmers by the local newspaper. Try running a print ad in any report you can find.
- **Flyers-** Create several different flyers for your program and hang them in every place a rural resident or animal lover might go such as feed stores, the post office, vet clinics, landscape centers, hardware stores, or pet groomers. Flyers cost pennies - hang them everywhere!

- **Craigslist**- Post creative barn cat ads to several area Craigslist sites every day. Try posting to the Pet section as well as the Farm section.
- **Tap the Equine Industry**- Horse people are animal lovers with barns! Every stable in the world wants rodents to stay out of their grain. Consider advertising in local horse publications. Contact your local saddle clubs and ask to speak at their next meeting. Go to horse events (shows, trail rides, swap meets) and set up a table or distribute flyers. Ask them to put a link to your program on their websites.
- **County Fairs**- Set up a table or distribute flyers. Ask for a donated/discounted space.
- **Farmer's Markets**- Set up tables here too! Ask for a donated/discounted space. Don't forget to approach all of the vendors there, most likely rural farmers themselves, and ask them how many barn cats they'd like to adopt today.
- **Radio**- Some local radio stations have a daily segment for residents to call in advertising items to be sold or given away, and another daily segment to announce community events. Make sure that pet adoption is allowed to be advertised, then call! Every day!
- **Word of Mouth**- This is probably the most important advertising you can do. Make sure that barn cat adoption is easy, convenient, and that your adopters feel good about their experience. Flat out ask them to spread the word.

Here are a few example ads:

Newspaper Ad

MICE IN THE BARN?

We can solve that problem for you the eco-friendly way!

We have lots of healthy, neutered, vaccinated, microchipped working cats available right now with **NO ADOPTION FEE!**

CALL OR EMAIL US!

SAFEHOUSEPETS@GMAIL.COM
OR (815) 407-SAFE

SAFE HOUSE
ANIMAL RESCUE LEAGUE
safehousepets.org

Non-Toxic Pest Control

The eco-friendly, green solution to your mouse, mole, and vermin problems!

No toxins, no chemicals, 100% natural, organic. And as an added bonus, you'll be SAVING LIVES.

A feral cat will keep your property rodent free for the price of daily cat food. Safe House Animal Rescue League is seeking farm homes with a barn, shed, or other shelter for healthy, neutered, vaccinated, feral cats.

Because these cats are not socialized to people, they are not adoptable and are euthanized at shelters - but they make GREAT working cats.

- Spayed or neutered
- Vaccinated and healthy
- Microchipped
- No adoption fee



(815) 407-SAFE
safehousepets.org

Talking with Potential Adopters

When contacted by a potential adopter we like to have an initial conversation with them about providing the cat with a suitable shelter, like a barn or shed, as well as daily food and water. An adoption questionnaire is often used prior to this conversation to help us find out a little more information on the potential home and adopter.

Adoption questionnaires can ask questions such as “What do you plan to feed the cats?” and “How many, if any, cats have been lost to coyotes in the past year?” to get a better feel for the area and type of home the potential adopter is proposing for the cat. Often, an Adoption Questionnaire will also provide an address. Using this address you can google map the location to see where it is located and if it is near a busy road. This information will help formulate your conversation with the adopter. If the adoption location is near a busy road you may need to discuss the fact that some feral cats can roam a half mile from their home in each direction each day.

Potential adopters are rarely outright denied as often a simple conversation on what the cat needs helps the adopter ensure that the cat will have a suitable living situation. Of course certain situations, such as not providing food and water, are grounds for denying an adopter.

When adoption inquiries on a cat come in it is best to email the adopter promptly with a standard response thanking them for their interest and explaining, in greater depth, how the program works. Ask them to please reply if this is something they’d like to move forward with.

When they reply confirming their interest in adopting call them to set up a delivery date and take the time to talk to them about the setup of their property, what sorts of outbuildings they have, how close they are to busy roads, if there is a known coyote predation in their area and any other questions you would like an answer to. The goal is to make sure a barn cat is a good fit for their set-up and for them as well. This also gives you a chance to chat with the adopter on the phone, answer any questions they may have, and make sure everyone is on the same page and knows what to expect. At this time, many adopters can make special requests such as “two females” or “a calico sure would be nice”. If you can, do your best to accommodate them. If they indicate they are interested in friendly cats, or very feral cats, try matching them to the appropriate temperament of at-risk cats currently in your program.

Since feral cats are very hard to shelter, and they certainly don’t show well for adopters, it is best to not keep a selection of them ‘on hand’ for adopters to hand pick out. Adopters can make requests but typically you should select the cat you feel is best for them. Adopters are usually happy with this arrangement.

One or two days before delivery or adopter pick up, send a confirmation email reminding them of the day and time and briefly reminding them, again, that the cats will arrive inside a crate and should be left inside for two to four weeks.

On the next couple of pages you will find examples of emails to potential adopters:

Initial Response to a Potential adopter

Hello,

Thank you for your interest in adopting barn cats! We'd be very happy to save some feral cats from grim fates and relocate them to your farm.

The cats that we relocate to barns are unadoptable as pets, they are feral and most likely will not approach humans or solicit attention, or they may take a long time to trust you enough for touching. Most of our farms say they only see the cats at night or at feeding time. So for the most part they will avoid you, and come out at night to eat and keep your property free from rodents.

They will need access to suitable shelter like a barn, shed, or garage. And they will need daily cat food and water put out for them. Cats cannot live on hunting alone and feeding them will not reduce their inclination to hunt rodents.

When they are delivered, the cats will be in a large dog crate with food/water bowls, sleeping box, and litter pan. The cats must stay inside this crate (which should be placed inside a barn) for a minimum of two weeks. 4 weeks is optimal, 2 weeks is minimal. This time is necessary to teach the cats where their new home is, where their food is, who brings the food, and to get a general lay of the land. If they are not kept confined like this for a minimum of two weeks, the cats will immediately run off in search of their former home, get lost, and may likely suffer a sad end. When the cats are delivered, we bring you cat food to get started and enough litter for the confinement period, plus the food dishes, litter pan, bedding, etc. When you have released the cats, you will just give us a call to let us know and we'll come pick up the dog crate.

The cats will be spayed or neutered, vaccinated, microchipped, dewormed, treated for any fleas/ticks, vet checked, and eartipped for identification. There is no cost to you for adopting these cats.

If all of this sounds like something you are interested in and able to provide for the cats, please let us know and we will make the preparations to deliver the cats to you. In most cases, our barn cats come from the euthanasia rooms of animal control facilities, so you will literally be saving their lives and should feel very good about offering your home to them!

Please let us know if you have any questions in the meantime, as well.

Thank you,

Safe House Animal Rescue League

safehousepets.org

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Second email to Adopters

Hello,

Thank you for your interest in adopting barn cats! We'd be very happy to save some feral cats from grim fates and relocate them to your farm.

The cats that we relocate to barns are unadoptable as pets, they are feral and most likely will not approach humans or solicit attention, or they may take a long time to trust you enough for touching. Most of our farms say they only see the cats at night or at feeding time. So for the most part they will avoid you, and come out at night to eat and keep your property free from rodents.

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Adoption and Relocation Process

To make the relocation process as convenient as possible for the adopters and to ensure that the cats have everything they need to get off to a good start you can provide a few of the necessities up front such as:

- A large bag of food (If finances allow)
- A large bag of Cat litter (If finances allow)
- A case of canned food (If finances allow)
- A gallon of water
- A crate (or relocation crate) for confinement upon delivery

You can set up your program to either deliver the cats and supplies to the adopter or have the adopter pick up the cat from you. Either way, during the process of handing the cats to an adopter the adopter should also receive any medical records, adoption paperwork, and information thanking them for adopting and advising them on how to care for the cats during confinement (see example flyer below).

Upon handing over the cats to their new adopter make sure to counsel them on the following topics:

- The crate housing the cats (this can be the relocation crate shown above if using that method) should be placed inside the shelter which will ultimately become the cat's main residence. Place it in a convenient location so the caretaker can access it daily. Try and place it where it is free from direct wind and sun, but affords the cats a vantage point to see their new environment to begin acclimating.
- Cats should remain inside the relocation crate for a minimum of two weeks with four weeks being optimal. It is important to impress upon them that the cats absolutely must not be let out prior to two weeks or they may run away.
- Feed, water, and clean the litter pan at least once daily.
- When feeding canned food once or twice daily make a special call ("here, kitty kitty") when feeding so that the cats learn this call as their food signal and when eventually released, they can be called back home when needed.
- During confinement, the more time an adopter can spend bonding with the cats, the more likely the cats are to remain at their new home. The nicer accommodation and the more the cats come to recognize the adopter as the 'food lady' or 'food guy,' the more they want to stay with the adopter. This can be as easy as talking to the cats.
- During confinement is also when the optimal time to acclimate any dogs to the new cats. Dogs and cats should be allowed to get a scent of one another and get used to the idea of one another without allowing the dog to stress or upset the cats.

When four weeks have passed, the crate door is unceremoniously left open one morning and the cats are allowed to exit at their own accord. The adopter should continue feeding near (but not inside) the crate. Many times cats will continue to sleep in the crate. If possible, allow the crate to stay on site as

long as the cats are using it. Once the crate is done being used, ask people to contact your organization and then go to pick up the empty crates up when you're in the neighborhood.

Flyer given to adopter on adoption day.



CONGRATULATIONS

**You've just adopted a barn cat & saved her life.
Here are a few tips to help her acclimate:**

Please place the cat condo inside the barn or building you want them to reside in. Place the crate somewhere convenient for you so you can feed/clean the cats easily for the next few weeks.

The single most important thing you can do to help your new cats is **KEEP THEM IN THEIR CRATE** for 2-4 weeks. (2 weeks is the minimum, 4 weeks is optimal.) Your new cats are understandably frightened and confused right now, they do not know where they are and they do not know that you are trying to help them. If you let them out before 2-4 weeks, they will run away, get lost, and perhaps die. So for 2-4 weeks, please keep them confined in their crates.

Feed daily, scoop their box daily, and provide fresh water. Most cats will stay at the back of their crate, inside their hiding box, while you feed and clean. Most will not try to escape, but use precaution. While you feed, talk to the cats, make "kitty kitty" calls, etc so the cats learn that the sound of your voice means food! At the end of the 2-4 week confinement period, simply leave the crate door open and allow the cats to come out at their own pace. Leave the crate in place and continue feeding nearby, but outside of the crate. Often the cats will continue to use the crate to sleep.

After they have been released, continue to provide cat food and water daily. Cats cannot live on mousing alone and they will leave your farm for greener pastures if you do not provide cat food. They will still hunt rodents if you feed them.

When the cats have stopped using the crate, please email us at adopt@safehousepets.org and a volunteer will pick it up. If you have any questions at all, please contact us! We are here to help!

Please tell others about our Barn Cat Program! Unfortunately, unsocialized feral cats like the ones you just rescued are being killed in shelters across the US every single day. Help us save them and spread the word that they make great working cats!

Safe House Animal Rescue League -- safehousepets.org -- (815) 407-SAFE

Follow Up

The follow up process can be essential to customer/ adopter satisfaction, ensuring a smooth transition for the cats and the adopter, as well as a way to pick up any supplies left with the adopter. Below is an example timeline for following up with barn cat adopters.

- **2-3 days post adoption-** Contact adopter to make sure things are going well.
- **4 weeks post adoption-** Follow up again to check in and also inquire if the crate is ready and available for pick up.
- **3 months post adoption & 1 year post adoption-** Email survey to adopter asking how the adopted cats are doing.

When the empty crates are picked up, dispose of any materials left inside and take a group of crates to a DIY car wash to hose them out. Do not reuse plastic litter boxes, cloth bedding, or plastic food dishes.

FAQ's With Monica

Q - Do you charge an adoption fee?

A - No. I strongly advise you do not charge an adoption fee, either. It is my experience that very few adopters would be as persuaded to adopt these cats if there was a fee. About 1/3 of our adopters make a donation toward the program, and almost all go on to become supporters of the organization in one way or another.

Q - Do you charge a crate deposit?

A - No. In 5 years we have had exactly zero crates stolen.

Q - My adopters won't keep the cats confined for two to four weeks.

A - This was our biggest issue in the beginning. Now we drill the two to four week mantra into their heads over and over again, and are very upfront about the fate of the cats if released early. Barn cat adopters want to help these cats, if you explain it to them the results of letting them out early, they typically listen to you. Overemphasize and keep repeating the two to four week rule.

Q - But what about coyotes? We have fifteen million bazillion coyotes and they are killing everything and eating babies!

A - Coyotes are a real threat to any small outdoor animal, there is no arguing that. However, I feel strongly that the fear of coyotes, as they become more and more visible to suburban residents, is grossly exaggerated and sometimes the irrational fear is even used as an excuse as to why barn cat programs should not be enacted. Coyotes are becoming as demonized as great white sharks. The farm locations we adopt to range from the extremely rural to the outskirts of suburbia. However, in my experience, the loss is nowhere near as great as some fear it to be.

In the post-adoption data gathered as of 2015, only 2% of cat losses were confirmed lost to coyote predation. We do not receive calls from adopters wanting more cats as the last were all eaten by coyotes. It is simply not an epidemic for us, in any way, contrary to what some people fear.

That said, we do talk to adopters about coyote predation issues, do not adopt outdoor cats to homes where predation is a known issue, and we do advise the community on ways to minimize predation. Further, an outdoor life is a risk to any creature. But what is the risk to the cat left behind at animal control who faces imminent euthanasia due to temperament? Studies from Alley Cat Allies show us that the overwhelming percentage of citizens believe it is more humane to release a cat to nature even knowing that something bad might very well happen to the cat in the future. That is a statistic I agree with and I believe is essential to respecting the nature of a feral cat.

For tips on minimizing risk and protecting outdoor cats from coyotes, please visit my blog on this subject at:

http://www.humanesociety.org/animals/coyotes/tips/coyotes_pets.html?referrer=https://www.google.com/

Q - Do you adopt in the winter, too?

A - Yes, we adopt barn cats all year long. Since the overwhelming majority of the cats who enter our program are already outdoor cats, they have already built up their winter coat and acclimated to the season before they entered animal control. We are also ensuring that their new home provides shelter inside a building, which is a new luxury for many former street cats who find themselves impounded at animal control. If we were adopting a formerly indoor-only cat to a new farm home, we would wait until spring.

Monica's Lessons

Feral cats are very difficult to shelter

Sometimes they cannot be vaccinated upon intake at animal control. They may not eat at animal control. Their cages may not get cleaned well at animal control due to their flight risk. Heaven only knows where they came from and now they're stressed. All of this makes for sick cats.

In the beginning, we pulled cats who had been at animal control a long time and were thus exposed to a multitude of disease, and some became ill. To combat this, we now pull feral cats as soon as possible to lessen their exposure to disease. We house them in a dedicated quiet room, give them Hidey Boxes, and cover them up.

We also give a dose of Convenia to every single barn cat during sterilization. This has dramatically reduced the number of URI and calicivirus incidents that occurred during relocation. If a cat begins to sniffle or sneeze at their new farm home, we provide antibiotics to place in the food and are prepared to take the cat back for urgent medical assistance if needed. Because feral cats cannot be handled very safely, many are not candidates for extensive or invasive supportive care. We treat any sign of illness very aggressively from the onset to alleviate the necessity of invasive supportive care on a fractious cat. When we are seeing outbreaks of calicivirus at animal control, all cats are given a full mouth exam during sterilization surgery so we can see any early signs of mouth ulcers and begin treatment immediately. If we are seeing panleukopenia outbreaks at animal control, we will hold cats for 10-14 days past vaccination to ensure their health before we send them to their new farm homes.

Feral Cats Are Messy

For reasons unknown to me, feral cats are notoriously messy in confinement. You will need to replace bedding frequently. They tend to make less mess when given pellet litter versus clay. Avoid using very large food/water bowls as those will need to be dumped and cleaned daily.

Who Stays and Who Doesn't

Friendlier cats seem more likely to stay after relocation, as do kittens. It's no surprise that the most likely to run away, no matter how long they have been confined, are the huge alpha toms. When relocating a cat who has clearly been alpha cat on his block for the past several years, it would be good advice to confine him the full length of time and make his new home as inviting

as possible through liberal use of tuna, sardines, catnip, and any cat whispering tricks you have up your sleeve.

It isn't a science and every cat is an individual who will ultimately make their own choice, which we have to respect. It is also fairly common for adopters to report that a neighbor has since adopted/stolen their new barn cat because the neighbor puts out tuna/milk/treats for the cats. Cats will always go where the proverbial grass is the greenest.

Match Homes and Cats

We have several working dairy farms and pig farms who adopt working cats. They can't have poison around their livestock and can't have mice contaminating grain, making livestock ill. Cats are a natural solution for them, but they do not want kittens and they do not want cats getting underfoot and in machinery. This program is a simple solution for them and these farms often want "super ferals". They want to see eyes at night but no other sign of cats. For these farms, we match them up to cats we are confident, are 100% feral, and former street cats. Rough, weathered city cats are an excellent choice for these farms. They have no interest in being a pet and a barn filled with hay, a bowl of kibble, and fresh water is a big upgrade for many of them. They will do great here.

Alternatively, many of our hobby farms and stables are simply looking for outdoor pets. Many of them have luxe heated barns, heated cat beds, canned food fed twice daily, and accommodations fit for a king. Many of our warehouses, greenhouses, and retail locations want a friendly shop cat who will interact with customers. These are the homes we match to our special needs cats, requiring some extra care, and the ones who are friendly and really want human interaction but aren't suitable for traditional adoption due to one reason or another.

Be Realistic

No farm home, nor any adopter, is perfect and I'd urge you to give up the idea of perfect. Not every farm is going to provide heat in the winter, canned food twice daily, cat beds, and toys. Thankfully, not all cats require those features! Think about the places feral cats are living and thriving right now. They are hardy, resourceful, capable creatures. They are fighters and they are survivors. Give them the credit they deserve, find quality (if not perfect) adopters, and get them out of animal control alive.

Relocation is not 100% successful no matter how many you've done. Some cats will not stay at their new home no matter what you've tried. Some will run off or fall victim to any of the dangers a wild animal faces. It is part of the feral life.

Cats do stay! Cats can go on to lead new lives in their new homes and live happily ever after. What we can do for them is ease their struggle, make them healthy through sterilization and vaccination, implant them with a microchip as a safety net, set them up with a suitable new home, and give their new caretakers the tools for success. After 3,000 relocations, and spending years advocating for feral cats and Trap Neuter Return, one thing I know for certain is that every impounded feral cat at animal control wants out. I know that if you were to ask any one of them if they would rather be 'humanely' euthanized right now at animal control, or if they would rather take a chance on a new farm, warehouse, or stable where something bad might

eventually happen to them, every single cat would take that chance. You are their opportunity. Don't let perfection stand in the way.