

Making Good Adoption Matches Using Feline-ality™

Many people who visit Lollypop Farm in search of a new kitty friend bring a mental checklist of requirements. That might be “female, calico, and friendly,” or “young, tabby, and playful.” Others walk into the shelter without a specific type of cat in mind, believing that they’ll know when they see the right match.

Both types of potential adopters can benefit from the Meet Your Match® Feline-ality™ Adoption Program, created by the ASPCA. Feline-ality procedures, which have been thoroughly researched and carefully developed, help shelter staff assess cats’ temperaments and

tendencies and match them with adopters who are looking for kitties with those traits.

Many shelters across the country are using the MYM program and are seeing great benefits—not only for their adopters, but for the cats themselves. The Kansas Humane Society, for example, enjoyed a 46 percent increase in adoptions, while the Animal Refuge League in Maine reduced euthanasia rates by more than 45 percent.

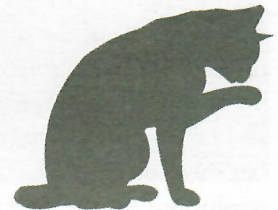
After undergoing training on the Feline-ality program this summer, Lollypop Farm adoption staff and volunteers rolled out the program in August at all of our adoption locations—our main shelter in Fairport, the **love bug** PetSmart Adoption Center in Henrietta, The Mall at Greece Ridge Adoption Center, and the Pet Saver Superstore Adoption Center in Greece.

“The biggest benefit to adopters is the ability to help them find the perfect match,” says Gillian Hargrave, director of strategic initiatives at Lollypop Farm. “We want an adoption to be successful, and this takes the guesswork out.”

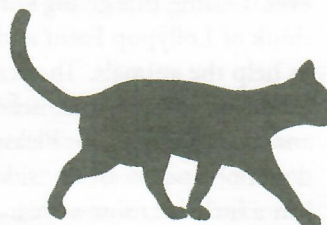
Feline-ality works on both sides of the adoption process—evaluating each cat and each person interested in adopting one. The behavior of each kitty made available for adoption at Lollypop Farm (specifically, those who are at least nine months of age) is thoroughly evaluated.

How It Works

The first step—after a cat passes his health check in the veterinary clinic—involves observing how he acts in his kennel three different times over the next day and a half. Volunteers fill out a Feline-ality data card with



love bug



sidekick

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Making Good Adoption Matches

Using Feline-ality, *continued from cover*



private investigator

information on body posture, cage condition, response when the cage door is opened, and whether or not food has been eaten. Next, volunteers bring the cat to a room he has never seen and perform the rest of the evaluation.

Hargrave sums up the session: "In a way, we pose questions to the cat: What are you going to do when I do this? When I pet you, when I play with you—what kinds of toys do you like most? It's a process of getting to know them better, and we use the information from the assessment, combined with the data card, to determine his Feline-ality."

The program categorizes cats by color: green, orange, and purple. The points the cat earns during testing correlate to one of those colors as well as a helpful, fun description, which may be MVP, Party Animal, or Leader of the Band (green); Executive, Sidekick, or Personal Assistant (orange); and Private Investigator, Secret Admirer, or Love Bug (purple).

"What I really like about the program is that the Feline-ality descriptions are very clear and practical," says Hargrave. "They provide a clear picture to an adopter about what that cat's going to be like when he gets into the home. And providing realistic expectations for adopters is key to making the perfect match. Adopters don't want to be surprised—they want to know what they're getting, and this really solves the problem."

An example of one of the Feline-alitys is the Secret Admirer: "When it comes to relationships, I'm very level-headed," it reads. "I don't leap in paws first, if you know what I mean. But give me a little time, and then I'll shower you with purrs, head-butts, and plenty of lap time. In the meantime, you may not see a lot of me, but I'll be thinking a lot of you!" All nine descriptions are available to read at our adoptions desk.



secret admirer

Instituting this program wouldn't have been possible without the help of numerous volunteers. "The evaluations are virtually all volunteer-based," says Hargrave. "This is an amazing group of volunteers—totally dedicated. They went through a couple of days of training, which was followed by mentoring."

Pairing People and Pets

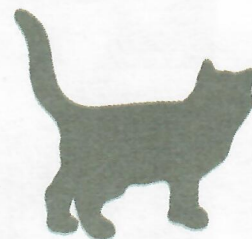
The next step in the process is making the perfect match. When an adopter expresses interest in a cat, she is asked to fill out an easy, one-page Cat Adopter Survey that helps our adoption counselors match her to the right sort of cat. Questions include, "How do you feel about a boisterous cat that gets into everything?" as well as statements to evaluate, such as, "I prefer my cat to be talkative" and "My cat needs to be able to be alone."

Again, the total points are calculated to determine whether the adopter will be labeled green, orange, or purple.



Each person is given a color-coded "guest pass" to bring along while she looks at the adoptable cats, and each cat cage has a color-coded card on it. These survey results are meant as a guide and a recommendation, not as a strict requirement.

Most people, like most cats, turn out to be orange, says Hargrave. However, these kitties may not be the ones who benefit the most from the program. "Of the three colors, our purple cats are typically the ones who don't show well here in the shelter—they're usually curled up in the back of their cages," she says. "What the program does is provide a better picture of what those cats are going to be like at home, so it gives those purple cats a better chance of adoption."



the executive

Feline-ality at Lollypop Farm is still too new to have produced enough data to analyze its results, but Hargrave and the staff have high hopes for the future. "My goal, first and foremost, is meeting our customers' needs, to find the cat or cats of their dreams," she says. "In addition, we hope to lower our return rate, to adopt out more cats, and to shorten cats' time spent waiting for new homes." ●