

FAQ'S About Fostering Cats and Kittens for Little Rock Animal Village

Why do you need fosters?

Foster homes are the first line of defense for fragile kittens. Every year we get in hundreds of kittens who are too young to be put up for adoption. Some come to the shelter with their mothers and some come alone or with their littermates, but all underage kittens run the risk of becoming sick if they stay at the shelter until they are old enough to be adopted. By going out to a foster home, they have a much better chance of survival. In addition, by getting all that added attention of a foster family our kittens have a leg up when going to their forever home. They are much more sociable and make better pets because of their experiences in foster.

How does the LRAV foster program differ from other foster programs?

Many foster programs are intended to house an animal until it has been adopted, in some cases for months or even years. At LRAV, all our fosters are short-term. Cats or kittens are placed only until they are old enough or healthy enough for adoption. In most cases, this means when kittens reach the age of 8 weeks. The foster parent is not responsible for finding the forever home for the kittens, it's the shelter's job to find them homes.

How long would I need to foster?

That totally depends on the age of the kittens when they come to the shelter. If they are newborns it will take about 8 weeks before they are old enough to be spayed or neutered and put up for adoption. Some kittens come to us as soon as the mom has weaned them, around 4 weeks of age. While still too small to be sterilized, these kittens will need to go to a foster for about 4 weeks. Sometimes we get kittens who are just a couple weeks shy of that 8 week mark, in which case they will stay with a foster parent for just those few weeks.

Why is 8 weeks the magic age?

It's a state law that no animal will be able to leave a shelter until they are spayed or neutered. Kittens need to weigh about 2 lbs. before surgery, which is the average weight at 8 weeks.

What happens to the kittens when they return to the shelter?

We try to schedule the kittens' return the morning of a day when we have a spay/neuter clinic. After they are sterilized, they will receive a final check from our vet and then be ready for adoption. They will be photographed and featured on our website as well as Petfinder.

In addition to the cages at LRAV, we are fortunate to have several cages in both the WLR and NLR Petsmart adoption centers and have been very successful in getting our cats and kittens adopted through the stores. Kittens in particular are often adopted within days, sometimes within hours, of arriving at the store. Like most retailers, Petsmart's traffic is heaviest on weekends, so we try to always have our cages full by Friday afternoon and keep in touch with the stores to fill in throughout the weekend.

Do you ever foster adult cats?

Yes, we occasionally send adult cats out to a foster home if they need time to recuperate from an illness or injury, need some special attention to become more sociable or sometimes if they just need a break from the shelter. All cats/kittens 4 months old or older must be spayed/neutered before going out to a foster home.

What if I don't want to give the cat or kittens back?

The purpose of fostering is to provide a temporary home for a cat or kitten until he or she is ready to be adopted, but it's very easy to fall in love with those cute little furballs that you take into your home to nurture. Of course as the foster parent, you have the first opportunity to adopt any cat or kitten you have fostered, but please remember this is not the intent of the program. Your job is to get them started on the path to a wonderful life.

What kind of experience do I need?

The most important experience is having lived with your own cats so that you recognize what is normal and not normal for cats and their behavior. If you have some caregiving experience (as a parent, nurse, vet tech, etc), all the better, but it's not essential. We'll train you in what you'll need to know and we're available 24/7 for questions. Some fosters bottle-feed newborn orphans. Some like to specialize in caring for mothers with a new litter. And some like to care for toddlers who need to be able to run and play. The foster coordinators at LRAV will train and back you up with any concerns you may have.

I have children, can I still foster?

Of course, some of our best fosters have children and under supervision, the children help foster the kittens. It's a great relationship for all the youngsters, both human and feline and it helps teach children responsibility, compassion and altruism.

Who pays the expenses for the cats or kittens?

We ask that the foster parent provide the food and litter for their kittens. All veterinary care is provided by the shelter. The shelter will provide special supplies such as Kitten Milk Replacement (KMR) for nursing bottle babies.

What if my kittens gets sick?

Although foster homes provide the healthiest environment to these fragile kittens, it's not unusual for one or more of your charges to get sick. The most common health issue is Upper Respiratory Infections (URI's). While these are caused by viruses, they often progress to bacterial infections and our veterinarian will provide necessary medications.

What if my kitten dies? Do you ever euthanize kittens?

Sadly, through no fault of their own, most of our fosters have lost one or more of their foster kittens. Kittens are very, very fragile and when they are born. It's obvious that newborns cannot see, hear or smell, but some of their internal organs aren't fully developed either. Sometimes a kitten who was playing just a few minutes ago will die unexpectedly. Losing a kitten is a difficult experience to go through, but our foster parents need to understand that the time the kitten spent in their care was the best possible life they could have had. Under very unusual circumstances we may have to euthanize a fostered kitten, but this is only done for health reasons, never because of a lack of space.

What's the next step?

This is our favorite question. If you think you'd like to foster or if you have more questions, please call/text Debbie Heller at 501-590-9967 or email her at debbie.jonunderhill@comcast.net. You can download a foster application off our website, www.friendsoflittlerockanimalvillage.org or pick one up at the shelter. If you've never been to the Little Rock Animal Village, we'd love to show you around. We're open 8:00 to 5:00 Tuesday through Saturday.