



It's raining kittens: PHS/SPCA navigates kitten season

Nicolaas Foks, Staff Writer

With the peak of kitten season in sight, the Peninsula Humane Society & Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (PHS/SPCA) is bustling with countless cute, cuddly, and playful kittens ready to find their forever homes or much-needed foster parents.

Kitten season is the time of year when cat reproduction spikes. According to the PHS/SPCA, this is because the environment triggers the cat's reproductive system, specifically due to the increase in daylight hours after the Winter Solstice. The resulting influx of kittens often overwhelms local shelters like the PHS/SPCA, many of whom arrive with underdeveloped immune systems requiring specialized care from shelter staff.

The PHS/SPCA is open from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. at the Center for Compassion at 1450 Rollins Road in Burlingame. Potential foster parents or adopters can visit the animals and schedule a session if they consider adopting.

"We hope to spread the word about all of the kittens and cats available for adoption and to receive donations for them, like food and toys," said Colleen Crowley, the communications manager for the PHS/SPCA.

The PHS/SPCA welcomes specific Wish List donations to care for their kittens, offering an alternative to monetary gifts. Community members can also get involved through events like the upcoming Kitten Nursery Shower in May 2025. This shower allows prospective foster parents to meet the kittens and understand firsthand the commitment needed to care for these delicate young lives.

"13 to 15-year-olds can volunteer with a parent in the Kitten Nursery, and 16 to 17-year-olds can volunteer in the Kitten Nursery on their own. This includes feeding, socializing, and cleaning up after the kittens. Parents can also fill out an application if their family wants to foster a kitten," Crowley said.

Fostering cats of any age benefits the shelter and the individual. For the shelter, this means freeing up vital space and staff time, plus offering a nurturing home environment for cats in transition. For the individual, while it comes with day-to-day responsibilities, such as maintaining a clean litter box and managing occasional messes, it also provides an opportunity to bond with an animal, without taking the full responsibility of adoption.



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Two kittens wake from their daytime nap and look through the window at potential foster parents. "The main preparation, of course, is taking care of the stars of the show, the kittens! We have lots of volunteers who help the staff with that. We also do outreach through our social media and website to invite the community," said Colleen Crowley, the communications manager of the PHS/SPCA.

"I've been fostering kittens for as long as I can remember. Some of my earliest memories are playing in the pens with my siblings and the kittens. My family learned about it through another family in my sister's grade. They had a couple of kittens they were taking care of, and they asked if we could look after them for a little while as they went on vacation. After seeing how much fun it was to take care of them, we knew we had to look into it for ourselves, which is how we started fostering our own," said Patrick Harvey Guedes, a Carlmont sophomore and experienced foster parent with the PHS/SPCA.

Stories like Harvey Guedes's illustrate the deep commitment and personal rewards found in fostering. At the end of the animal's journey through foster care, they need loving families to accept them as a forever pet. Recognizing that adoptions are valued just as much as fostering, the PHS/SPCA has a dedicated process to help make these connections.

"Adopters fill out an application and then sit with one of our adoption counselors. They are skilled at matching adopters with a great match for them. They also facilitate a meet-and-greet with potential adopters and the pet they are interested in. This can sometimes be in our indoor play yard, like with dogs. For cats and small animals, this is in a separate room. For same-day adoptions, arrive by 5 p.m. People can also call and make an appointment if they prefer," Crowley said.

While incredibly rewarding, fostering a cat is not the best option for every individual. The need for loving homes extends far beyond temporary foster care. The PHS/SPCA and other local shelters have numerous pets, each needing a forever home.

"I have fostered one dog before, and I have also rescued one dog, both of which were from Rocket Dog Rescue, similar to the Peninsula Humane Society; they both seem to have a similar goal and message. But fostering the dog was a little more challenging than actually adopting. For one, when we were fostering a dog, it felt less natural because we would have to part ways with it eventually," said Emmett Rennich, a Carlmont sophomore.

Many foster parents relate to the bittersweet moment of returning their foster pet to their chosen shelter. However, this touching moment is also a profound testament to the foster's incredible success. It signifies that they have lovingly nurtured, socialized, and prepared that animal for the ultimate goal. Many foster parents view it as a launch, rather than an ending, because it allows them to help a new animal needing a loving temporary caretaker.

"Saying goodbye to the kittens after they have stayed with you and you have built a strong bond with them is one of the hardest parts. It is tough if you are a young kid, as I was. I wished I could keep them forever, but I knew giving them back to the shelter was better. With some, it is much harder to return than others, which led to my family's adoption of our two cats. Both were kittens we were fostering, and the bond we made was too hard to break, so we ended up keeping them. But in the other cases, it is best to remember you are doing it for the well-being of the cats and to help them become healthy and grow, to hopefully find a forever home. There is no shortage of kittens during kitten season, so knowing you did so much to help out the shelter makes it just a little bit easier to let them go," Harvey Guedes said.

There are common misconceptions when it comes to animal care. For instance, while responsible pet ownership certainly requires financial planning, the fear of overwhelming costs is usually exaggerated, especially when shelters like the PHS/SPCA provide support. In addition, new caretakers generally overlook key fundamentals, such as exercise, building connections, and maintaining consistent grooming.

"People do not realize cats need exercise. It is good to play with them indoors so they get some running around! Also, there is a misconception that with cats, you can just feed them, give them water, and clean their litter box. But they need enrichment activities to stimulate them, and time to connect with people. And even though they clean themselves, they still need to be brushed and have their nails trimmed as part of their care. So even though they seem quite independent, they need lots of love, care, and attention," Crowley said.

Understanding the full scope of a cat's requirements for interaction and exercise, as detailed by Crowley, is essential. Moreover, new caretakers have to consider which resources to get for which animal.

"What do you need to foster a cat? That seems a little odd, but with a dog, all you have is a leash, a collar, a harness of some kind, a dog bowl, and a water bowl. Those are the bare minimum," Rennich said.

The answer to Rennich's question depends on how much the caretaker is willing to spend, how long they will have the pet, and what fits the best in their home. There is no clear answer, but new caretakers can find general knowledge on resources needed by asking other pet owners and foster parents, or by asking local shelters and looking at their websites. Fostering, adopting, or caring for kittens provides knowledge that is not easily accessible anywhere else.

“Fostering kittens is lots of fun and helps shelters out a lot. I always enjoyed playing with them and watching them try to figure life out as they are so young. I remember often falling asleep with all of them on top of me, and my mom would show me the pictures afterwards. All that can be super enjoyable, especially for kids. If you are going to foster, you must be a responsible caretaker. The kittens are tiny and fragile, and whether it is dealing with ringworm, feeding them through syringes, or trying to get them out of tight places, it can be a big deal taking care of them, and it is not always as perfect as it seems. I would advise researching and ensuring your household is ready to care for them before you decide to foster,” Harvey Guedes said.