

What Have We Got? A Backlog.

Each time we make a trip into PAWS or any other spay/neuter clinic, we have cats and older kittens that are not really welcome or well cared for where they came from. We do our best to figure out what best to do with these felines. If completely feral and have a buddy, great, they can be relocated pretty easily. Others may be “talking” to us – but does that mean that they wish to come inside and be handled? Very often it means that they have learned that making those sounds that the humans respond to gets them what they want – in this instance OUT OF THIS TRAP! but usually food is forthcoming at the very least. Allowing us to touch them thru the trap mesh with no negative response - does that mean that they might progress to allowing a full-on touch? Not always, sometimes they are just fearful of doing the wrong thing, so they do nothing. At times we can get all the way to a full on pet with a hand protected with a towel and they don't attack us – but, ahhh, is that just because they are playing our game in hopes of getting out of this 2 ½ x 10” square space? Once they have a full belly, their true nature may come out. Then the cats that give you the cold, fish-eyed stare yet lean into your touch thru the trap and push back when you touch them with the protected hand and all of a sudden make a dive to the bottom of the trap, purring their brains out!

All of these cats have had varying degrees of interaction with humans. Some of the most feral are known to have been in a home before – clearly not to their liking. Some of the absolutely friendliest from the get-go have never been touched. Until we have them on our hands there is no knowing.

Even then. We have cats that have shown all the positive signs and two months later have progressed no further and have actually regressed. And then what do we do? We've done our best. Been as creative as possible with the resources that we have. Those resources unfortunately are a cage for many of these cats, for what may seem a very long time for them. As they behave in a way that we can trust them, we allow them “out” time. There might be regression at that point and back to the cage they go. This regression may take the form of not allowing themselves to be picked up, being nasty to other cats or flat out being nasty to us – they got “out”, got things on their terms, they've arrived! But we can't allow that, there aren't adopters for those cats. Adopters want cuddly, they want pickupable at any

moment, they want cats that can get along with other cats, dogs, screaming babies, grabbing toddlers, geriatric walker-using elderly. Yes, this is blunt.

So we have a backlog of cats that are not adoptable by the “typical” adopter. The way things used to be, they would be euthanized. That’s it. In this enlightened age, despite no increased resources, we find that we just can’t do it. But still we have a backlog. Some of these cats have been put back outside, gone to outside fenced in areas to be retrained to the outside before relocation but there is limited opportunity for that retraining space. For relocation to be successful, cats need to have bonded, worked out their differences, be willing to share space together and that can take a couple months. While we are lucky to be participating in the Cats At Work Program, the cats need to meet certain criteria for success. Can’t send single cats, they don’t stay, they take off.

When we have been lucky enough to find a foster for some of these cats, a foster that does not demand interaction, lets the cat be its own cat, sometimes a transformation happens, the cat starts interacting, becomes the “typical” adopter dream. That can take months and months. And we have been incredibly fortunate to find some atypical adopters who understand cats, accept them on their own terms and are just glad to have the cats in their homes to feed and love without having to touch them.

So often if you give someone an out, allow them to say no, they so often say yes instead and that’s what these cats are needing. A place that is patient and safe, meets food and shelter requirements and gives them the chance to say YES!

We’ll be working on our backlog, we just can’t afford it any longer. That means that more of those talkers, more of those leaners, will be returned outside until they become cats that leap into the laps of those people sitting in lawn chairs or on the back step and demand to be petted. Watch out, those claws have not been trimmed!

In the meantime, if you can help us work on our backlog, if you are willing to let a cat just hang out in your house, if you are less needy than the “typical” adopter, you may have a very pleasant surprise when you meet the approval of one of our backlog cats.