

# Fostering success

Volunteers care for purebred cats until a forever family comes along



KARA GUZMAN/SENTINEL

Amy Cayton embraces one of her four adopted cats in her bedroom, where her family has built a cat playpen and patio.

*Animal Welfare*  
By KARA GUZMAN

kguzman@santacruzsentinel.com

✓ WATSONVILLE — Amy Cayton compares fostering cats at her home with raising her children. Judging by her emotional investment, it's easy to see why.

"You're providing life and food and shelter and education and emotional care," said Cayton. "We certainly do that with [our children], but you can also do that with animals."

Cayton volunteers as a foster parent for Purebreds Plus, an animal rescue dedicated to the rehabilitation and placement of purebred and exceptional cats. She stumbled upon their website three years ago and fell in love with a picture of a kitten.

She discovered that the kitten was being fostered at a Santa Cruz home, and it had a sister.

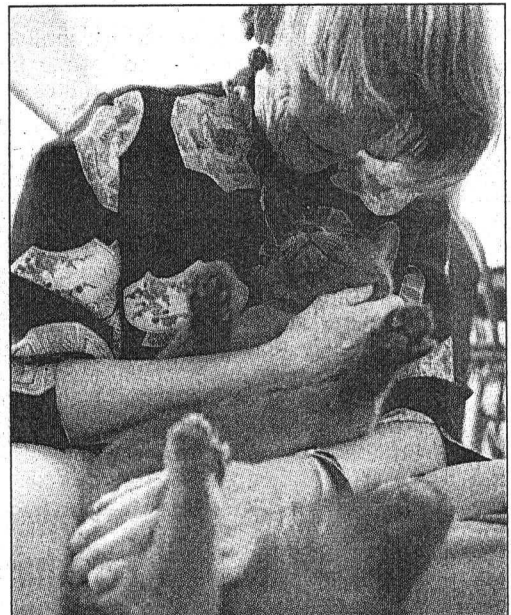
Cayton adopted both kittens, and decided to volunteer.

The program's cats come from animal shelters, animal control and owners who need to give up their cats. Foster parents agree to provide food, medical care and a calm, safe environment for however long it takes to find an adoptive parent. The program covers each animal's veterinary bills through donations and subsidies.

"From the beginning we know it's a transitional relationship," said Cayton. "You're saving this cat's life and you are their guardian until they can find their best optimal forever home."

For Cayton, a Santa Cruz marriage and family therapist, her relationship with the foster cats is not one-sided.

"I'm providing a refuge for the cats, but they're also providing a refuge for me," said Cayton, who adopted her cats after battling an illness.



KARA GUZMAN/SENTINEL

Purebreds Plus volunteer Amy Cayton plays with Om, a cat she adopted through the rescue.

# FOSTERS

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"They bring me into the present moment ... I'm more patient and more compassionate and more attentive to the needs of others."

Cayton is one of thousands of people who have fallen in love with a cat photo on the Purebreds Plus website.

The program has noticed a "groupie" phenomenon, and has fans who check the website every day, follow which cats have come and gone and cheer on the adoption process. The site gets more than 1,000 visitors each week, according to volunteer webmaster Ty Michelfelder.

"Just this week I got a call from a lady who told me that she has watched the website every night for years," said Karen Pahler, president of the Purebreds Plus board of directors. "Today she wanted to adopt a cat."

Since its founding in 2007, the group has expanded in size and number of cats served. Currently the group has 40 volunteers in a variety of roles, from website management to animal transportation and microchip registration. Foster homes are located throughout Northern California, Oregon and Nevada.

The organization has 85 cats in its foster system, and that number can swell up to 100 cats in the summertime, according to Pahler.

In 2012, Purebreds Plus found permanent homes for

## AT A GLANCE

PUREBREDS PLUS

**WHAT:** A volunteer-run foster care program matching rescued cats with forever homes

**VOLUNTEER NEEDS:** Potential owners, foster parents, transporters, administrators

**DETAILS:** [purebredplus.org](http://purebredplus.org)

450 foster cats. So far this year, 124 foster cats have found their homes through the program.

By serving purebred and exceptional cats, the program fills a niche in the animal foster care community. Each breed has particular needs and temperaments, and specialized foster programs are better equipped to find appropriate homes for these animals, according to Melanie Sobel, general manager of the Santa Cruz County Animal Shelter.

Most of the time foster programs take cats when the cats are not doing well at the shelter, said Sobel.

"The cats might be extremely frightened because they're in a stressful environment," said Sobel. "The best thing to do is put them in a calm home environment where they can settle down."

"Foster care is the greatest thing. It literally expands the walls of our shelter."

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