



The Animal Welfare League *of* Arlington

PRESS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Abandoned Animals Find New Hope with Animal Welfare League of Arlington's Foster Program

(Arlington, VA August 2, 2004) -- After months of research and planning, the Animal Welfare League of Arlington kicked off its much-anticipated foster program, sending 27 underage kittens to six foster families in Arlington and Alexandria. Since the inception of the foster program, 21 kittens that otherwise may not have been considered for adoption have returned to the shelter to find homes.

Earlier this year, in response to the needs of the shelter and the community as a whole, the Board of Directors for the League adopted a policy permitting fostering. Puppies and kittens under the age of eight weeks, by Virginia law, are not candidates for adoption because they are highly susceptible to disease and a host of health problems. To address this issue, the League is recruiting and training foster parents to care for these babies until they are ready for a permanent home.

To launch the foster program, the League assigned the care of two orphaned five-week-old female kittens to Alexandria resident Ruth O'Brien, the League's first official foster parent. O'Brien volunteered to foster kittens because she needed a "kitten fix," but did not want to add another animal to her family of three adult cats. When they came to the League, the two orphans were underweight and needed a bit of tender loving care. Under O'Brien's care, these two little ones gained enough weight to return to the shelter, where they were adopted two days later.

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Foster parent Lucy Kernan Schloss and her family are fostering the largest litter the League has sent out so far—a mother cat with her litter of seven kittens, and one orphan the mother cat has "adopted" as her own. Kernan Schloss said she was looking for the perfect volunteer opportunity to engage her children, who range in age from 13 to 19. "My husband and I each grew up with cats who had kittens, but our kids have

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never had that wonderful experience. It seemed too good to be true. Everyone has been very involved in the fostering effort and has had a great time,” she says.

Foster parenting does not require any previous animal care experience; the League provides the necessary training for all foster parents. Adrienne Goldsmith, the coordinator of the League’s fostering program, says the foster parents in the program are as varied as the animals they are fostering. “We have foster parents who work full time, parents with animals and children of their own, and parents who have never owned pets—our volunteers run the gamut.” But they all have one thing in common—a love of animals. Goldsmith says the League’s foster parents care for animals “that cannot survive on their own, and that wouldn’t fare well in a shelter environment. They give these animals a second chance at a happy life.”

Although foster parenting is rewarding, it can be heartbreaking, too. Foster parents must face the risk that any animal they care for may become sick or die. Orphaned animals, in particular, often suffer from what is known as a “failure to thrive,” which, in practical terms, means they lack the immune system necessary to ward off illness. In June of this year, six orphaned foster kittens from the same litter contracted upper respiratory infections—the equivalent of human colds—and could not fight off the infections, in spite of veterinary visits and antibiotics. The decision to put these six kittens to sleep was a difficult decision for League staff to make, and an emotionally taxing experience for the foster parent. “Not everyone can handle the downside of foster parenting,” Goldsmith says. “Losing a foster animal isn’t easy. But foster parents have to focus on the happy endings, and know they are doing the best they can.”

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Although fostering presents new opportunities for the League’s youngest charges, it can have a negative impact on older animals at the shelter. The foster program increases the number of animals available for adoption, but it does not increase the number of people who want to adopt shelter animals. To combat this problem, the League is working to boost community awareness about homeless and unwanted animals,

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both young and old. One such effort is to include animals available for adoption on the Petfinder website, where prospective adopters can search a database that includes more than 150,000 adoptable pets. Adopters can access this website via a link on the League's website, at www.awla.org, or at www.petfinder.org.

If you are interested in volunteering for the League as a foster parent, please contact Adrienne Goldsmith at (703) 931-9241, ext. 245. You can find the necessary application forms and a description of the program on the League's website, at www.awla.org. The League will provide all supplies. Foster parents need only provide the love and attention these little ones need.

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