

Cat Matchmakers Team

Description of Team Responsibilities

Mission

Austin Pets Alive!'s Cat Matchmaker Team's primary goal is to provide great customer service to clients, and to help reduce decision paralysis - i.e., when an adopter is faced with too many options, they end up not making a decision at all and do not adopt; and to help special needs cats be adopted. Our team is meant to be a point of contact and a resource for any questions that might come up when adopting a cat, and make the process less overwhelming.

Standard Procedures

Every email or phone call received should be logged into the matchmakers team tracking spreadsheet on the same day. The spreadsheet consists of the date of inquiry, the name of the adopter, a brief summary of their requests, which cats were recommended to the adopter and whether or not they went on to adopt from us. If they did go on to adopt from us, then the name of the cat adopted should be listed, as well as any notes about any adoption obstacles the cat might have faced. Data collection is important because it helps us track trends from within the program - find out what works and what doesn't, so that we are continue to improve.

All volunteers have login access to the catmatchmaker@austinpetsalive.org email account. There is one volunteer assigned to each day of the week and is responsible for handling all incoming inquiries that day. For example, if my day of the week is Monday, then I would be responsible for responding to all of the calls and emails that come in that day. Emails should be responded to from the catmatchmaker@ email account, and within 24 hours. Phone calls should be responded to within 48 hours maximum. The sooner the emails are responded to, the more likely the person is to adopt.

The contact info for the group is online, given out by counselors on business cards, and is listed on flyers located in all of our catteries. If any adopter leaves without a cat, or if a good fit for them is not at that given location, counselors are instructed to inform adopters about the matchmakers program. Often times these adopters are overwhelmed by the number of choices onsite or on the website, and are not moved to take action and adopt until after a discussion with the matchmakers team. We are meant to catch those adopters who would otherwise fall through the cracks!

After ascertaining what the potential adopter is looking for in a cat, a list of 3-5 cats (or 3-5 pairs, if the adopter is seeking two!) should be provided to the adopter, as well as a hyperlink to the cat's profile. You might need to ask more specific questions, and that is okay! If an adopter doesn't know what they are looking for or does not provide enough details, some questions to start off the conversation with are:

- Do you have any kids?
- Do you have any other pets?
- How long are you usually out of the house for/what does your average work day look like?
- Are you looking for a specific age, gender or color of cat?
- What is the overall energy level in your home?

- What does your ideal kitty's personality consist of?

These questions will help you get a much better idea of what kitties will be a good fit for your potential adopter!

A primary focus is to get special needs cats adopted. As such, volunteers should try to include at least one cat who is more challenging, long stay, or has special needs in their list of recommendations. For example, if an adopter wants a young and healthy kitten, a volunteer might include a kitten who is missing an eye or has ringworm in their list of recommendations. A brief summary playing up why the cat is a great match and why the special need is manageable for the adopter's lifestyle should also be included.

Always use positive language when describing a cat. Lead with all the reasons why they are a great fit, not with the cat's behavioral or medical challenges.

Team members should be polite and helpful! Our goal as matchmakers is to be patient, understanding, attentive, calm, empathetic and to communicate well and clearly. Matchmakers are not to screen, attempt to deny/approve an adoption, etc. This is the adoption counselor's job, and it is much more difficult to determine whether or not someone will be a good adopter over email than during an in person interview! We are gently steering potential adopters to cats who might get overlooked, but would still be a great match. Many adopters just want help in narrowing down the options available. If any red flags come up in the course of the conversation with the adopter, do not address them with the adopter - email the matchmaker program manager or team lead, and they will make sure that the counselors are aware of your concerns. Volunteers are also free to follow up with the team manager and/or team lead if they are stumped by a particular request.

Example of a poor response:

Example email:

We would not declaw a cat, but know there must be a few that are already declawed in need of a home? If so, can you please send me pics and info?

Example response:

Hi Ryan,

I'd love to help you in your search for a cat! We have 4 kitties that are previously declawed.

Boris-4 years old, cannot be around kids, must be an only pet, bite history

Munchkin -15 yrs old, best as an only cat

Ginger-12 years old (we don't have a personality description on her yet)

Max-16 years old, daily medication for tummy trouble

Takeaways:

The matchmaker should have asked more information about what the adopter was looking for - gender, age, why they want a declawed cat, etc. Sometimes this is okay, but the initial email from the adopter is very sparse, and more information was definitely needed. The matchmaker does hyperlink the names of the cats to the cats' profiles, but only lists the negative traits about the cats. Since the matchmaker did not ask any questions about what the adopter is looking for, we have no way of tying that information into the positive aspects of the cats suggested. The email response to the adopter was very sparse and impersonal.

Examples of great responses:

Example email 1:

Hi, we are interested in adopting a kitten, but would like a little help narrowing down suitable candidates. We are a stable family of four in Hyde Park, with two kids (9 and 12) and an easygoing 10 year old dachshund. We are looking for a kitten that would enjoy relaxing on the couch and sometimes being rubbed (a lap cat would be great), is ok with kids and dogs, and preferably has a more relaxed and mellow disposition. Any thoughts? Also, is there a way we can meet a few kittens to be sure we can find a great fit?

Example response 1:

Hi Jason, I'd be happy to find you a kitten who fits your needs! I did want to give you a little warning though that most kittens are pretty high energy. Generally, we recommend they go in pairs so that they can entertain themselves while you're away from home and not keep you up all hours of the night. They wear each other out playing so that they're more inclined to snuggle with you! Additionally, we have no adoption fees for the entire month, as incentive! We are not opposed to adopting out singletons though, and the adoption counselors will give you lots of tips to wearing out a kitten's high energy if you want to stick with that route! Anyway, that little bit aside, do you have any gender or color preferences for your new kitten? I can certainly find one who is kid and dog experienced! I'd get you in touch with the fosters of whatever kittens you decide to meet, or maybe even find you a litter so that you can have several to choose from under one roof. You're more than welcome to visit more than one foster home, though!

Takeaways from example 1:

The matchmaker addresses the adopter by name. They go into detail about why two kittens are better than one, but are not pushy or rude in response. They are gentle, and explain that it is not REQUIRED when adopting kittens, just suggested. They acknowledge what the adopter is looking for (a kitten who is kid and dog experienced) and ask a couple more questions (gender and color preferences) before going on to respond with suggestions. They conclude the email by letting the adopter know a little bit more about what the adoption process entails.

Example email 2:

Hello, I'm interested in learning more about your adoptable cats. I'm looking for a cat between 1 - 4 years of age who enjoys cuddling (at least on occasion), but wouldn't mind being left alone during the day while I'm at work. I would prefer a female cat, but am flexible because the cat's personality is more important to me than its sex or coloring. Since I am away for work during the day, I couldn't commit to a cat with medical diagnoses that might require constant care. Would you happen to have a few recommendations for potential adoptable cats given the information above? I'm interested in dropping by the shelter around Saturday, May 27 to meet some potential cats.

Example response 2:

Hi Annie! I'd love to help you in your search. We have plenty of cats who fit your needs, who are both beautiful and have lovely personalities.

First is Canoodle. She's a major people kitty who loves chin rubs, greets her foster people at the door with cute chirps, and has just the most lovely big round eyes. She's described as the perfect companion kitty. She is in foster, so you'd need to schedule a meet and greet, but I believe she's well worth considering, taking into account what you're looking for!

The same goes for Budgett. Retired mom cats are the best. I've fostered 3, and they're the most tolerant, loving, grateful animals! She's both a lover of belly rubs and following her people around, serenading them with purrs and soft meows. She's a bit shy, so she'd probably be perfectly content to be a single kitty.

Finally is Dolly Pawton. She's described as being "all about the snuggles"—and it's definitely the case! She'll curl around your legs with her motor purr and charm you with her fluffy brown fur. She has been diagnosed with FELV (Feline Leukemia virus), which results in a weakened immune system. This can result in a shortened lifespan, but she's perfectly happy, sweet, and a truly lovely companion. It also means that her adoption fee is waived and APA! will help with any issues that may arise. I understand if she can't be considered for this diagnosis, but wanted to let you know about her since she's so wonderful—she really fits the bill otherwise!

Other than that, we constantly have many lovely cats at our Main Cattery on Cesar Chavez. That's where our greatest concentration of cats resides. It would be a good first place to visit on the 27th if none of the cats in foster catch your eye. Dolly is also currently there in our Feline Leukemia Adoption Center! Let me know what you think, and if you'd like to meet any of these lovely cats.

Takeaways from example 2:

The matchmaker again addresses the adopter by name. The matchmaker lists three cats, along with a little bit about each cat and why they could be a good fit for the adopter. The positives

about the kitties and the specifics as to why they are a good fit for the client are listed - eg: "she'd probably be perfectly content to be a single kitty" and mentioning Dolly's love of cuddling, tying into what the adopter asked for and reflecting the language that the adopter used. The matchmaker mentions her personal experience with nursing mom cats, which makes her come across as more friendly and approachable to the adopter. The kitties also had their names hyperlinked to their profiles. One "special needs" FeLV cat is listed, alongside the pros of adopting a felvie, and mention of the post-adoption treatment coverage. The matchmaker again concludes with a bit more info about the adoption process.