

# Fearless : Starting a Feline Leukemia Adoption Program

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Helping People Help Pets

# Feline Leukemia Program



## **What is Feline Leukemia**

Feline Leukemia (FeLV) is a virus, not a cancer. It impacts a cat's immune system, and is similar to a person with a compromised immune system. While the virus weakens the immune system, leaving the cat more susceptible to illness, the virus itself does not cause pain. FeLV+ cats look and act just like any other cat and can live long, happy lives.

## **APA!'s Feline Leukemia Program**

Austin Pets Alive! created the most robust feline leukemia shelter program in the world and has become the epicenter of shelter-based FeLV research and care. Our protocols for FeLV+ cats are continually evolving in alignment with the cutting edge research happening in our program and with over a decade of experience in saving viral positive cats.



## APA! Program Stats

## APA's Feline Leukemia Program (continued)

- Official Program launched in 2016 with 2017 as the first "full year"
- Prior to starting a program we adopted out about 25 FeLV+ cats per year
- By starting a FeLV+ program, our stats increased to–
- First Full Year:
  - Intakes: 259
  - Adoptions: 100
- 2021 End of Year Stats:
  - Intakes: 470
  - Adoptions: 584

Cats testing positive for FeLV+ **CAN** be adopted!

# INTAKE / ONSITE HOUSING



## Intake Requests for FeLV Cats

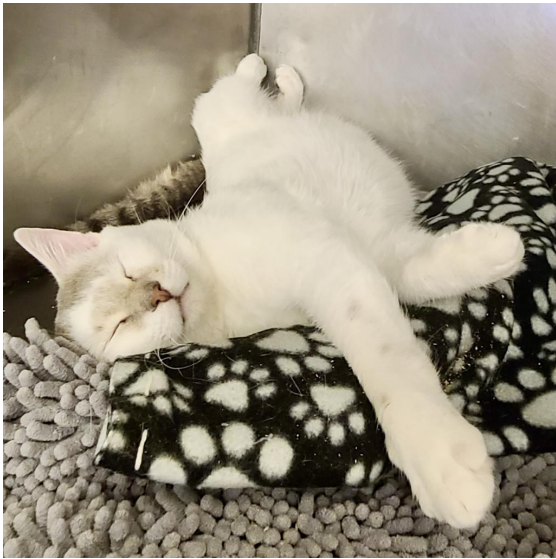
- APA! gets over 600 requests per year to intake FeLV+ cats. All cats get added to a waitlist which we triage by location.
- We only take cats with a positive FeLV test and request sending shelter only uses IDEXX brand tests



## Housing FeLV+ Cats

- Healthy FeLV+ cats are housed in a Feline Leukemia Adoption Center; cats will illness in a condo. FeLV+ cats CAN be housed in a cattery with negative cats if necessary
- Volunteers maintain our FeLV room day to day with a lead volunteer overseeing the volunteers. Cats are fed and medicated the same way as cats in our cattery that are not FeLV+

# FOSTER



## **Foster is the Answer!**

90% of FeLV+ cats in APA custody are currently housed in a foster home

## **Recruit!**

- Inform: FeLV+ cats have the same day to day lives and all cats deserve love - spread current information
- Reach out to current fosters: Felvies can be fostered with other species, just not FeLV- cats. Fosters can still foster negative cats after positive cats get adopted
- Social Media Marketing: Facebook posts/live; Instagram; TikTok.
- Stress lifesaving: Other shelters would euthanize. Let fosters be the hero- you are TRULY saving these lives.

# Use Volunteers to Recruit!

Volunteers send out foster pleas:

- Make pleas clever and captivating
- Highlight cat's personality
- Attach PDF's on FeLV information and Fostering
- Stress URGENCY!

FeLV  
Foster  
Pleas

It's the weekend, so I figured we'd spice things up a little and play a game. Oh WAIT, it's just me who got played!

**HOT TAKES - \$400**  
When THIS event occurred, Oliver Lacosta became the world record title holder for enduring the largest mass rejection in a 24 hour period.



Even Alex Trebek is shook.  
I'm just lookin' for one lil home that doesn't have any cats in it for my sweet Bagel Bites:



She is three-years-old, spayed, has extra toe beans! LOVELY.



## Support!

- Volunteers send welcome emails and check in!
- Quick response to foster needs- treat fosters like GOLD!
- Foster Mentorship: be there to answer questions and provide same day support - Train Volunteers to be mentors!
- Clinic Support: Give fosters access to routine / non emergency medical support within 24 hours as well as emergency support. If you do not have a clinic, work with a vet to create shelter protocols- then reach out for meds- the vet doesn't need to see the cat!

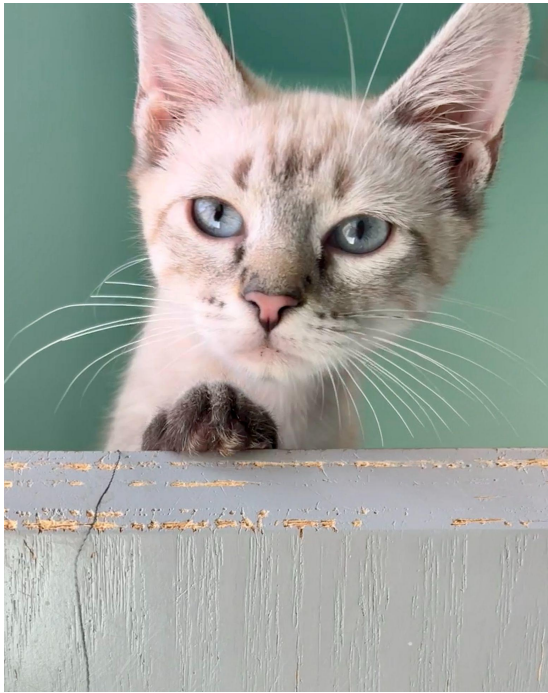
Supporting  
FeLV+ Cat  
Fosters



## Supporting FeLV+ Cat Fosters

## Support (continued)

- Create email templates for routine questions - medical, behavioral, and adoption related
  - Offer foster sitting: This incentivizes keeping a potential longer stay foster
  - Build relationships: Know who can be contacted for higher medical needs, who prefers sitting gigs, etc and contact directly when need arises
  - Facebook groups: Create a support / networking groups for FeLV Fosters
  - Foster Sharing Shed: Provide area where fosters can access donated items to use that is self-accessible.
- Remember - Most of your program support can be volunteer-based- Use your volunteers!**



## Retaining FeLV+ Cat Fosters

## Retain!

- Thank them loud and often.
- Offer condolences and support when necessary
- Develop relationships
- Encourage fosters to advocate for felv+ cats
- Make it easy— they will keep coming back if its easy.
- Keep track of your fosters and follow up when some time has passed
- Have a system for recognizing and appreciating fosters

# ADOPTIONS



## **FeLV+ Cats CAN Be Adopted!**

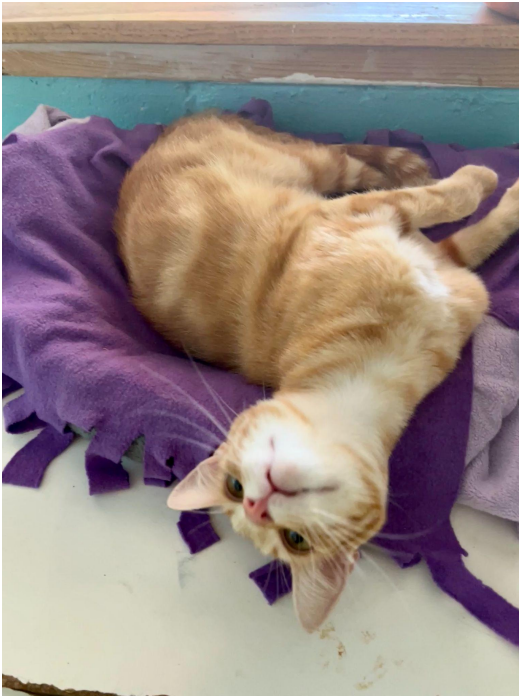
- How we talk to adopters makes the difference-
  - These cats are healthy most of the time
  - FeLV+ in cats is similar to a person with a compromised immune system
- Target Potential Adopters:
  - No other cats in the home
  - College Students
  - First time cat owners
- Social Media Marketing: Facebook posts/live; Instagram; TikTok.
- Stress lifesaving: These cats are often euthanized. Let adopters be the hero- you are TRULY saving these lives and rescuing them.
- Provide as much post-adoptive support as possible - volunteers can triage requests - post-adoptive medical support; behavioral support; felv questions FOR THE LIFE OF THE CAT

## Adoptions (continued)

APA! ran an adopter satisfaction survey:

- 74% of respondents had a “very positive” experience living with a FeLV-positive cat adopted from APA
- 21% of respondents has a “positive” experience with their adopted FeLV cat
- 73% of respondents were “very likely” to adopt a FeLV cat again
- 11% of respondents were “somewhat likely” to adopt a FeLV cat again

Overall, adopters of FeLV+ cats are happy they adopted a FeLV+ cat and would adopt again.



**Adopter  
Survey**

# MEDICAL CLINIC SUPPORT



## Supporting Fosters / Adopters

- Create a medical protocols for the most common occurring conditions: URI, Inappetance, and Lethargy are primary concerns reported by fosters or adopters
- Most commonly prescribed meds for FeLV cats:

Azithromycin, Baytril, Doxy for URI;  
gabapentin for palliative care; mirtazapine for  
appetite

- Have a specific email address fosters and/or adopters can reach out to with medical questions and to get prescriptions
- If you do not have a clinic or vet on staff, develop a relationship with one– share shelter’s medical protocols and reach out for RX when needed in accordance with your protocols
- If possible, provide basic and easy meds for life of the cat

# Common Concerns

- “No one will adopt a FeLV+ cat”
  - We just proved adopters WANT to adopt these cats and WILL.
- “We need the space for other cats”
  - Send this kitty to foster! Suggest this kitty as the most in need to the next person applying to foster that has no other cats in the home! Fosters WILL take these kitties if they know the alternative is euthanasia!



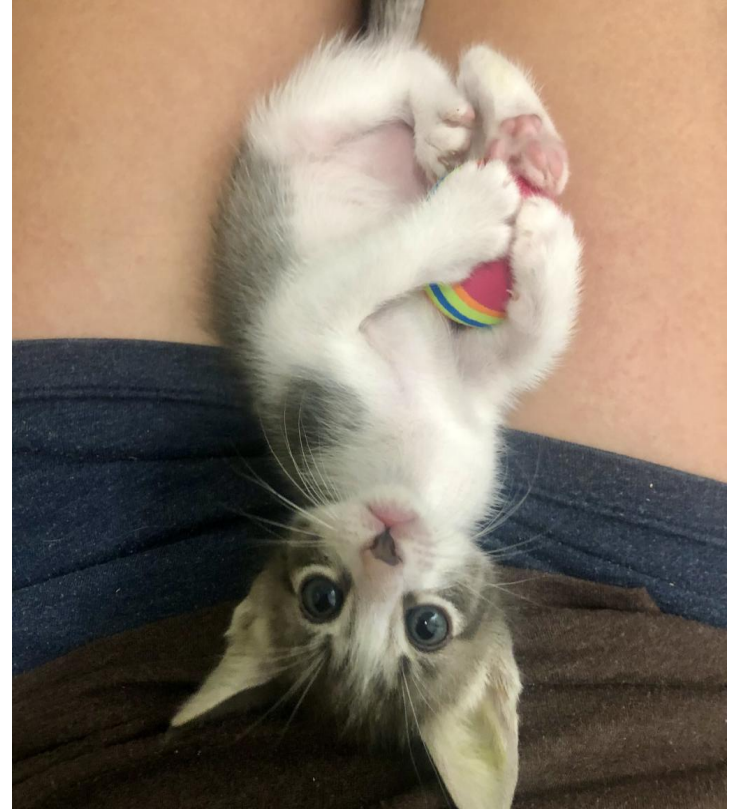
## ADOPTION BARRIERS

You CAN Find homes for them!



# Common Concerns

- “FeLV care is too expensive”
  - FeLV cats have the same common health concerns as other cats, typically URI. For more serious conditions, offer palliative care.
- “I don’t want a sick cat”
  - These cats are NOT sick! They’re like any other cat day to day. If they start to become sick, it’s important they receive medical attention important they receive medical attention



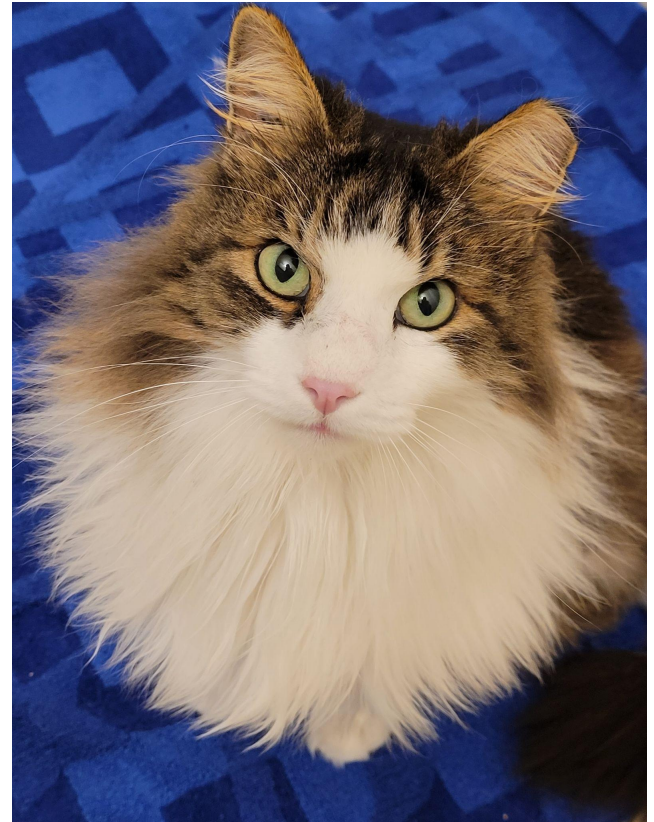
## ADOPTION BARRIERS

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# Common Concerns

- “We don’t have enough staff”
  - Use volunteers! ANYONE can volunteer to help in the felv room without the risk of bringing home FeLV to their cats. Volunteers can feed, medicate, and clean!



## ADOPTION BARRIERS

You CAN Find homes for them!



# AM I THE BARRIER?

ADOPTION BARRIERS

You CAN Find homes for them!



# Getting Help!



## Contact Us For More Information!

Feline Leukemia Program:

[FeLV@austinpetsalive.org](mailto:FeLV@austinpetsalive.org)

## FeLV Toolkit:

