

# HHP Feline Rescue Code of Ethics

Updated October 2022

FINAL

## Introduction

The basis for this Code of Ethics was originally created in 2007 for the rescue community in Canada by the Founding Committee (see below). Since that time, it has been reviewed and commented on by over 40 rescue groups in Canada, and subsequently modified based upon input from those groups. Helping Homeless Pets has adopted this Code of Ethics as our official code, and all of our member rescues have agreed to adhere to this Code. Should you have any comments or feedback concerning this Code, please contact us at [hpa2010@gmail.com](mailto:hpa2010@gmail.com).

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## Section 1 – Definitions

Words using the singular number only shall include the plural and vice versa and words using a specific gender shall include the other gender. The word “person” shall include adopter, adopters, affiliates, corporations, companies, members, partnerships, representatives, rescues, rescuers, syndicates, trusts and any number of aggregate of persons; and

The headings or clauses used in this Code of Ethics are inserted for reference purposes only. They are not to be considered or taken into account in construing the terms and provisions thereof, nor to be deemed in any way to clarify, modify or explain the effect of any such terms or provisions.

### In this Code of Ethics:

**“Adopter”** – means any person or persons who legally takes ownership of a cat by signing an adoption contract with a non-profit organization; an adoption fee may be involved. All references to the term “adopter” are interchangeable with “potential adopter” and are to include the singular or plural forms in the context of this document.

**“Animal”** – means any member of the animal kingdom, other than a human.

**“Founding Committee”** – means the committee of people that created this Code of Ethics.

**“Grievance”** – means a formal complaint that has been registered by an individual or group who believes a violation of this Code of Ethics has occurred.

**"Member"** - means a rescue or rescuer who as an official member of Helping Homeless Pets has undertaken to abide by this Code of Ethics.

**"Must"** – means this condition is a requirement of meeting the Code of Ethics.

**"Owner"** – means any person or organization having legal custody of and/or responsibility for an animal. This would include a person who has paid and entered into a contract and/or paid an adoption fee to a rescue or shelter to take custody of an animal. This owner cannot be under the age of 18 years.

**"Kitten"** – means a young or immature cat.

**"Feral Cat"** – means a cat which has never had and/or does not want any contact with humans.

**"Region"** - means a geographic area within Canada. It may be a municipality, a province, or any part thereof.

**"Rescue"** - means a non-profit organization. It may be registered or recognized by one of the provinces or territories of Canada or the Federal Government, or it may be the work of one or more individuals. It is realized and accepted that there are many different rescues at different stages of development and maturity. All references of the term "Rescue" may be interchangeable with the term "Rescuer" and are to include the singular or plural forms in the context of this document.

**"Rescuer"** – means an individual person. This person may be a member or volunteer for a rescue group. All references of the term "Rescuer" may be interchangeable with the term "Rescue" and are to include the singular or plural forms in the context of this document.

**"Screen or Screening"** – means the process of determining whether a potential adopter would qualify to adopt a cat, and/or be a good match for a specific cat. Foster homes are also screened to ensure that they would be a suitable temporary home for a cat.

**"Should"** – means this condition of the Code of Ethics is recommended, but is at the discretion of the Rescue.

**"Violation"** – means mandatory condition or clause contained in this Code of Ethics that has been breached by a member.

## **Section 2 – Committees**

### **2.1 Founding Committee**

This Rescue Code of Ethics was originally created by members of Helping Homeless Pets from various rescue groups, backgrounds and experience, the objective being to define best practices that our member rescues must follow, and thereby provide the public a measure of trust with the rescues that adhere to this Code.

## **2.2 Ethics Committee**

The Ethics Committee is made up of representatives from five member rescues covering a range of species, each person having considerable rescue experience and knowledge of rescue best practices. They are charged with investigating any complaint that a member rescue has violated this Code of Ethics, and also advising the Board of Directors on policy matters.

## **Section 3 – General**

**3.1** Rescue efforts must be conducted as a not-for-profit endeavour, whether the rescue is an organization or non-profit corporation recognized by the province or the federal government, or is the work of one or more private individuals.

**(a)** When conducting rescue activities based upon the efforts of a volunteer workforce, individuals must receive no personal compensation for any rescue related work or endeavours. Rescues may, at their discretion, reimburse volunteers for out of pocket expenses.

**(b)** Where a rescue organization is incorporated as a non-profit corporation and hires employees to oversee their operations:

**(i)** Those employees must receive only their agreed upon wages and health benefits as allowed by provincial or federal regulation;

**(ii)** Rescues may, at their discretion, reimburse employees for out of pocket expenses;

**(iii)** Employees must not receive additional personal benefits or bonuses linked to their association or employment with the non-profit rescue organization from any source.

**3.2** Contact information for each member rescue must be provided to Helping Homeless Pets administration, to include the name(s) of the primary operator(s) of the rescue group, with a current mailing address, phone number and e-mail address.

**3.3** Each rescue must have third party insurance, either independently or through the Helping Homeless Pets group plan. Those rescues having individual insurance must provide details of the insuring company and policy number to HHP.

**3.4** Each rescue should seek to educate potential adopters, pet owners, the animal community, etc., about the responsibilities of cat ownership, including breed specific considerations, to the best of the rescuer's knowledge. Rescues may provide referrals to other reputable rescues, at their discretion.

**3.5** Each rescue must ensure all their volunteers are aware of and educated about the policies of the rescue, this Code of Ethics and the rescue's internal procedures for fostering, temperament evaluation and transport. Each rescue must ensure that all their volunteers are informed of and understand the importance of confidentiality.

**3.6** Each rescue must have a Mission Statement, containing information about the cats on which the rescue group focuses. Rescues may specialize in a certain breed(s), a certain group of cats, a certain age group (excluding kittens), a specific region(s) or any combination of these.

**3.7** No rescue shall produce kittens as a means to fund rescue activities. No cats will be bred, either intentionally or unintentionally, after being received into rescue. If such a breeding were to occur, the pregnancy is to be terminated and the female spayed forthwith as soon as this procedure can safely be performed by a veterinarian.

#### **Section 4 – Surrender Process**

**4.1** No rescue shall act as a sole repository or adoption facilitator for any breeder's unsold animals.

**4.2** Rescues may receive cats from a variety of sources. A rescue should not pay an owner a fee for a surrendered animal, other than under exceptional circumstances and with the prior written permission of the HHP Board of Directors. Nominal fees paid to a licensed animal rescue or shelter to release ownership of an animal or fees solely for services rendered (eg immunization or spay/neuter) are not considered buying or purchasing a cat under this Code of Ethics.

**4.3** Rescues may only receive cats from within Canada. Bringing in cats from any other country is a violation of this Code of Ethics.

**4.4** Rescues may establish a policy on surrender fees, and may collect this fee at their discretion. Persons or facilities surrendering a cat should be encouraged to make a donation to the rescue. It should be disclosed to the persons or facility surrendering the cat(s), that this donation is to help offset the cost of veterinary services and re-homing the cat(s).

**4.5** Rescues must provide a legal surrender contract and require the person who is considered the legal owner of the cat to sign and date the contract. The contract must also be signed and dated by an authorized representative of the rescue.

**4.6** The surrender contract must specifically state that legal ownership of the cat is being transferred to the rescue, and upon signing the contract, the person or facility surrendering the cat will have no further legal or other claim to the cat.

## **Section 5 – Fostering and Care of Animals**

**5.1** Rescues must require all fosters to sign a foster contract setting out the rescue's expectations.

**5.2** Foster parents must sign a declaration that they have never been convicted of any offence involving animal cruelty.

**5.3** Rescues must carefully screen their own foster homes, including home inspection, and personal and vet references.

**5.4** Rescues must ensure that all foster cats in their care are provided with proper and timely medical attention, food and water, exercise, socialization and grooming as necessary.

**5.5** Rescues must ensure that all foster cats in their care are provided with safe, clean and appropriate living conditions appropriate to the particular needs of each cat. Overcrowding of any animals, or animals kept in unsanitary conditions, is a violation of this Code of Ethics.

**5.6** Rescues must require all foster caregivers to alert the rescue if any cat in their care requires veterinary evaluation or medical attention, and provide the foster caregiver with a means to contact the rescue in an emergency. Foster homes must contact the rescue immediately should they observe or suspect any medical issue. In an emergency situation, the rescue will decide the course of action, in agreement with their veterinarian.

**5.7** Each rescue must define which standard procedures, tests and vaccinations are given to animals in their care.

**5.8** Each rescue must ensure that every animal in their care receives appropriate individual attention and exercise, behavioural assessments and/or training required for the well being of the animal and to ensure each animal is compatible with potential adopter(s).

## **Section 6 – Assessment of Animals**

**6.1** Each rescue must ensure that all animals in their direct care are appropriately assessed and evaluated for their temperament and behaviour, and retained until considered fully evaluated to the best of the rescue's ability. Such evaluations and assessments are utilized to find the most suitable adopter. The rescue must advise the adopter of the assessment that has been completed.

**6.2** Each rescue must advise and ensure the adopter understands that the assessment carried out is only an indication of the animal's temperament at the time of assessment and under the conditions tested. Many factors affect an animal's behavior, and the assessment in no way guarantees the future behaviour of the animal.

## **Section 7 – Adoption Process**

**7.1** All cats must be spayed/neutered prior to adoption, unless a veterinarian deems the cat can never be safely spayed/neutered, in which case that cat is exempt from this clause. If a veterinarian has deemed the cat may be safely spayed/neutered at a later date or if the cat is a kitten under 6 months of age, then the rescue may choose one of the following:

**a)** approve a prospective adoptive home as a foster home and place the cat there. Once the cat is spayed/neutered the adoption can be completed.

**b)** include the cost of spay/neuter in the adoption fee and complete the adoption. The adoption contract must state that the cat must be altered by the age specified by the rescue, or when a veterinarian deems it safe to do so. The rescue would then make arrangements to spay/neuter the cat when they reach the specified age or when safe to do so. Cats that are not spayed/neutered may not be placed in a home with unaltered cats of the opposite sex under any circumstances.

**7.2** Cats already in the adoptive home must be spayed or neutered unless actively showing, on breeding contract or medically unable to be spayed or neutered.

**7.3** The adoption biography of each cat must include full disclosure of known health and temperament issues, details of any current or continuing medication and/or veterinary treatment, and age or a best estimate thereof. The rescue will also provide known details as to the origin of the cat, eg owner surrender, shelter, kitten mill, stray, etc. The confidentiality of the previous owner must be protected, and information may be withheld to protect the privacy of the previous owner and the adopter, for the safety of all concerned, including the cat.

**7.4** The rescue must carefully screen prospective adoptive homes to help ensure that the adoption will be successful. Criteria to be used in making this determination are personal interviews, and personal and veterinary reference checks. Potential adopters must consent to access for a home check as part of the approval process, which may be conducted by the rescue at their discretion, or by an authorized representative.

**7.5** The rescue must provide a legal Adoption Contract and must require the person who will be the legal owner of the cat to sign and date the contract. The contract must also be signed and dated by an authorized representative of the rescue. This Adoption Contract must include the following wording: "The Adopter understands and accepts that any animal has the potential and ability to bite, and that the Rescue cannot be held responsible for any injury to any person or animal arising from the Adopter's decision to bring this animal into their home, however caused." Additionally, the recommended Addendum to the Adoption Contract (Cat) (see attachment to this document) must be fully completed by the Rescue and signed by all parties to the adoption and then attached to the Adoption Contract for any animal with a known history of biting, either prior to surrender or while in the care of the rescue.

**7.6** The rescue must include and honour a clause in their Adoption Contract requiring the adopter to notify the rescue if for any reason they cannot continue to keep their adopted animal, and to return the animal to the care and custody of the rescue if no other course of action can be agreed upon by both parties.

**7.7** At the time the adoption is completed, information about specific medical procedures, tests and medications that the cat has received must be provided to the adopter.

## **Section 8 – Feral Cats**

**8.1** Although rescues are not required to implement a Trap, Neuter, Vaccinate, Return (TNVR) program for every feral cat, they are required to support the concept of TNVR. Any group found to be speaking publicly against TNVR, or to be feeding feral cats without carrying out TNVR or seeking help from another group to do so, will be in violation of this Code of Ethics.

**8.2** Whenever possible, rescues shall humanely trap feral cats and kittens, and assess them for suitability to socialize and for adoption. When space exists, cats and kittens deemed suitable for socialization shall be spayed/neutered and vaccinated, and placed in a foster home.

**8.3** Those cats or kittens deemed unsuitable for adoption due to feral temperament shall be assessed by a veterinarian for health issues requiring essential treatment, then spayed/neutered, vaccinated, ear tipped and returned to their colony or original place of

rescue, where they should continue to be fed and sheltered, in as short a period of time as possible after recovery.

**8.4** Should a rescue not find TNVR possible on their own, there are steps to follow to make sure the colony is being tracked and cared for. This includes information on Megestrol Acetate (MA) (temporary birth control) and TNVR training, as well as the possibility of help and trap loans from other rescues.

**8.5** A basic “TNVR Guidelines” sheet is available to all cat rescues and members of the public on the HHP web site.

**8.6** For feral cats that are living in unsafe conditions or those who do not have adequate shelter or a caregiver, a barn placement is a good alternative. It provides these cats with a safer place to live, where they have shelter and daily meals. A basic Barn Cats Guidelines sheet is available to all cat rescues and members of the public on the HHP web site.

## **Section 9 – Conduct**

**9.1** Members are to carry out their rescue activities in a professional, positive and considerate manner, such that their representation brings credit to their own rescue and other ethical rescues/rescuers.

**9.2** Members must not utilize rescue discounts or donations specifically made for the benefit of animals in the rescue for personal gain or benefit.

**9.3** Members must avoid unwarranted negative criticism of colleagues during communications with the public.

**9.4** Members will assist other reputable rescue(s)/rescuer(s), when able, as per their stated needs and instructions. Examples of such assistance include visiting and/or assessing animals to be surrendered or transferred; visiting/assessing potential adopters, volunteers or foster homes; assisting with transport; temporary housing. When assisting another rescue, the requesting rescue/rescuer’s stated policies and guidelines must be respected and followed. Members must not use their position to divert a cat, a potential adopter or a potential foster home into their own or any other rescue without the permission of the rescue/rescuer who initiated the request.

## **Section 10 – Acceptance and Compliance**

**10.1** Each Member must accept and abide by this Code of Ethics.

**10.2** Each Member indemnifies and holds harmless the Committee, its individual representatives, affiliates, volunteers, and members thereof from any and all known or unknown, anticipated or unanticipated, suspected or unsuspected and /or fixed, conditional or contingent, actions, causes of actions, charges, suits, debts, demands, claims, contracts, covenants, liens, rights, liabilities, losses, royalties, costs, expenses, (including without limitation, attorneys' fees in any Court of law) or damages, loss, and not limited to liability howsoever caused in every respect, nature and description, at law or in equity, in connection or arising under this Code of Ethics. Rescue does not waive any related rights or obligations.