the golden age
Offering older animals another shot at love
101 rescued cats
Felinel find homes thanks to two groups’ compassion and collaboration

Last February, more than 100 cats were saved from an alleged hoarding situation disguised as a feral cat sanctuary in Mojave, California, but they weren’t out of danger. Almost all of them needed medical care, and although rescues took some cats early on, there were still 101 left at Kern County Animal Services (KCAS). The shelter had experienced huge intakes like this before, and it was always a struggle to get the animals (especially cats, not to mention supposed ferals like this group) placed in homes, says director Nick Cullen.

The staff was worried—that is, until Stray Cat Alliance (SCA) stepped in and diligently worked to pull cats from the shelter over the course of about a month. This effort, marketed as #OperationKern100, showed both organizations what can be accomplished when you put aside differences to save animals.

Both groups were pleasantly surprised the other wanted to work with them. KCAS, a municipal facility about two hours north of Los Angeles, has historically struggled to increase live outcomes, but after about five years of work, 70 percent is now its save rate instead of its euthanasia rate, says Cullen. Although the shelter has been building relationships with other animal organizations in recent years, it’s still easy for staff members to feel like they’re all alone trying to help the animals in their care, says Cullen, adding that his staff was ecstatic about SCA’s unsolicited help.

SCA is a Los Angeles-based organization that does about 500 adoptions annually, but mostly focuses on trap-neuter-return programs and community cat advocacy, and has a strong no-kill mission. In the past, shelters haven’t always been open to assistance from her group, says Christi Metropole, founder and executive director of SCA. But when her group offered to place the cats, KCAS enthusiastically agreed.

“For Stray Cat Alliance to reach out … and tell us ‘I can’t take them all now, but I can take 20 here and I’ll be back in two weeks for another 20,’ and follow through and stay in communication” was unheard of for his organization, says Cullen.

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If SCA’s efforts weren’t “deserving of a personal thank-you letter … I don’t know what is,” says Cullen. “Especially for an organization [that] has always struggled to find live outcomes for the animals that come to us, to have an organization to assist us … it was eye-opening; it was a blessing.”

For Metropole, receiving this unexpected thanks from Cullen was a fitting conclusion for an experience full of surprising solidarity along the way. “It made me feel really good and really grateful and like if we can all work together, we can save so many more lives and really change the system,” she says.

As of mid-November, 32 of the KCAS cats had been placed with other groups (and most had been adopted); a few truly feral cats went to a reputable sanctuary; and more than 20 are in foster homes (some long-term). Nearly 50 have been adopted through SCA, including friendly Celeste, who is about 12 years old and has a disfigured nose. After months of waiting for a home, someone fell in love with the “imperfect senior,” as SCA director of operations Avarie Shevin describes her—at, of all places, an adoption event for kittens.

—Colleen Jaskot

Each of the 101 rescued felines has had a happy ending thanks to the partnership between SCA and Kern County Animal Services.

SCA volunteer Will York transported cats from Kern County to vet clinics in Los Angeles and also delivered cats to foster homes as far away as San Diego.

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