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## Helping a stray become a pet

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By Shelley Widhalm - They have names. They have stories. They just can't tell you.

That's the job of the Washington Humane Society (WHS), an animal welfare agency that rescues animals and finds them good, permanent homes.

Raven, a 1-year-old female cat, likes to be scratched and rubbed, and she also likes her long naps. Princeton, a 2-year-old male cat, likes quiet and curling up on the couch. Fefe, a 5-month-old beagle-terrier mix, likes to play.

Raven, Princeton and Fefe are among the cats, dogs and other small animals waiting for adoption at the Washington Humane Society shelter on Georgia Avenue Northwest. The smaller of the Humane Society's two shelters — the second is on New York Avenue Northeast and is operated under contract with the Department of Health — the Georgia Avenue facility can house 15 to 17 dogs and 20 to 25 cats along with the occasional rabbit, guinea pig, hamster, bird and turtle. At any one time, WHS has 60 to 70 animals available for adoption.

"For many of them, this is their only chance to have a decent life and existence," says Michelle Otis, director of the Georgia Avenue facility.

That is why the WHS offers a host of programs and services both on- and off-site as it cares for more than 20,000 animals a year. WHS maintains an open-admissions policy to accept strays and animals that are abused, neglected or surrendered by their owners.

The programs include a foster home network for animals that are too young for shelter life and adoption or are nursing or recovering from health problems.

The spay/neuter program spays and neuters animals arriving at the shelter and offers low-cost sterilization surgeries for domestic animals at the National Capital Area Spay & Neuter Center in Northeast. WHS opened the center in October 2007 with founding partner Alley Cat Allies, an organization in Bethesda that advocates trapping, neutering and returning cats to reduce feral cat populations. WHS' CatNiPP, or Cat Neighborhood Partnership Program, also neuters and vaccinates feral cats.

The WHS Behavior & Learning Center, scheduled to open to the public this month, offers private and group lessons to train dogs and teach them commands and also works with adoptable dogs staying in the shelter.

"It provides a lot of emotional support and enrichment in their daily lives while they stay here," says Kevin Simpson, director of animal behavior and training.

The animals are walked daily by staff and volunteers. They have bedding, blankets and toys in their

kennels. The cats are brushed and groomed, and the dogs are bathed.

Volunteers come in regularly to keep the animals company, perhaps by reading with a cat on the volunteer's lap or by taking the animals to the playroom, says Diana Foley, WHS adoptions manager.

"We try to make sure they have a lot of enrichment throughout the day so they're not sitting in the kennel," Mrs. Foley says.

The enrichment helps the animals present better in the kennel and decreases their likelihood of becoming sick, says Tiffany Barrow-Rogers, chief operating officer of WHS. This presentation, "in turn, helps them get adopted faster," she says.

The adoption process involves a visit to the shelter, a fee and some paperwork. The fee of \$135 for dogs and \$80 for cats covers spaying or neutering along with vaccinations and disease testing. The fee is reduced for spayed and neutered animals.

Staff and volunteers are available to answer questions about the animals and give tours of the cat and dog cages and runs. If prospective adopters find an animal they like, they can take it to the playroom.

"They can spend plenty of time with the animal before they make the decision to adopt," Mrs. Foley says.

WHS is in the process of implementing the Meet Your Match adoption program, which matches adopters with animals through a personality assessment of the animal and a survey filled out by the prospective adopter.

Once matched with an animal, the adopters — who must live in the metropolitan area and own or rent where animals are permitted — fill out the adoption papers, which a staff member reviews. The staff discusses with the adopter the animal's personality and temperament, determined from a behavioral assessment identifying any potential behavior issues and possibilities for rehabilitation.

Adoptions take about a week to process.

#### WHEN YOU GO:

**Location:** The Washington Humane Society shelter is at 7319 Georgia Ave. NW. The D.C. Animal Shelter, which is operated by the Washington Humane Society, is at 1201 New York Ave. NE.

#### Hours:

The Georgia Avenue facility is open from noon to 7 p.m. seven days a week and from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. for emergencies. The New York Avenue facility is open from noon to 8 p.m. Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday and from noon to 5 p.m. Saturday and Sunday. It is open 24 hours a day for emergencies.

#### Parking:

Two-hour on-street parking is available at the Georgia Avenue facility; the New York Avenue facility has a free parking lot.

**More information:** Call  202/234-8626 or  202/576-6664, or visit [www.washhumane.org](http://www.washhumane.org).