

# **Caregivers in the Heartlands**

**A kind, gracious, harmonious neighbourhood for all**



# Home is where the heart is.

Cats in our neighbourhoods have a place to call home largely due to the efforts of a special breed of people in Singapore – caregivers.

Caregivers care for our community cats in one or more of the following ways:

- ❖ They feed the cats responsibly.
- ❖ They sterilise them to control the population.
- ❖ They assist the Town Councils in resolving cat-related issues in their estates.

These dedicated and passionate people are often familiar faces in their neighbourhoods. They are at times admired, at times misunderstood. But this has never stopped them for caring for the homeless, the hungry and the sick.

It is our aim here to share good caregiving practices that are beneficial to our community cats and considerate to our neighbours.



## **Let's put some heart in the choices we make that impact our community.**

There are people who love animals and there are people who don't. While we do not tolerate any form of abuse towards animals, we have to accept that there are those who would prefer not to have close encounters with them.

Just as animals inspire love, kindness and empathy in us, it is up to us to inspire the same in others. Therefore, our actions must aim not only to improve the welfare of animals but to build gracious human relationships that are vital to our community.

We are the ambassadors for our animals!

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# Are you a considerate caregiver?

Check the list to find out.

### Dos

- Are you cleaning up after you feed?
- Are you feeding in appropriate locations away from high human traffic?
- Are you sterilising the cats to prevent breeding and caterwauling?

### Don'ts

- Are you luring cats to loiter at unsafe or inappropriate locations, inviting complaints?
- Are you bringing cats from other areas into your area?
- Do you overreact when you see people go near the cats?

## Common complaints from residents

Leaving a mess after feeding Caterwauling and loud cat fights	Roaming, defecating & urinating on corridors and other people's properties.
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No one likes to live in these conditions. Our neighbours deserve our kindness and consideration too!



Repeat littering offenders and first-time offenders who throw larger items such as plastic bags, food wrappers, drink cups will be sent to court, where they may be imposed with a Corrective Work Order (CWO) for a maximum duration of 12 hours and/or a fine not exceeding \$1,000.

## Safeguarding our cats.

The safety and well-being of our cats depend on us. As the human representatives of our cats, it is important that we adhere to good caregiving practices. In this way, we lead by example to show other residents the appropriate ways to care for our cats. We also minimise complaints from residents and officers who may find fault in our practices.

**Feed responsibly. Feeding is not illegal but littering is.**

Don't place food directly on the floor. Use paper plates, bowls or newspaper.

Always clear up leftovers and do not leave a mess.



Always feed cats downstairs. NEVER feed upstairs along corridors, on stair landings or in car parks, as cats would be attracted to loiter in these areas and cause inconvenience to your neighbours.

**Sterilise, sterilise, sterilise**

Sterilising the community cats deals with the issue at the source. There is not enough homes and tolerance for all the cats that are born to the streets. Sterilised cats also have less chance of being rounded up to be culled!



Contact SPCA for more information on sterilisation vouchers and the Cat Welfare Society on their sterilisation subsidy and reimbursement scheme.



# A sustainable cat management model.

Sometimes there doesn't seem to be any light at the end of the tunnel when it comes to improving the plight of strays. There are not enough homes, caregivers or shelter space, while abuse and culling continue to occur.

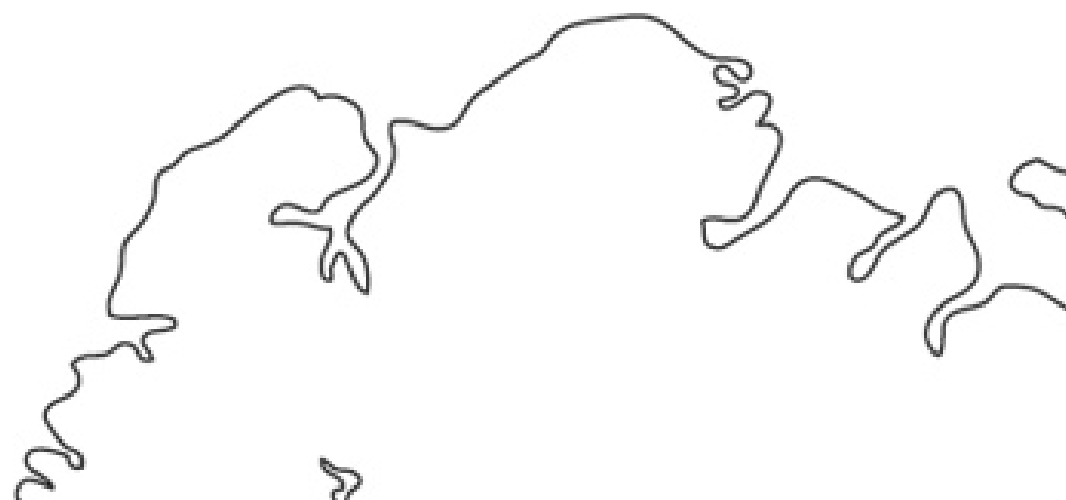
If we are clear about how the issues can be tackled in the long and short term, it puts our collective work into perspective as well as the areas to focus on in groups, as programmes or as individuals.

## GOAL NO. 1

### **Regulate supply of animals to the community**

What we want to see happen

1. Better regulation of demand by consumers and supply from farms, pet shops and home breeders through enforcement and education.
2. More informed pet owners.
3. Eye-witnesses of pet abandonment to come forward to assist in investigations leading to prosecution.





## GOAL NO. 2

### **Robust animal welfare sector**

What we want to see happen

1. Building cooperation and trust between organisations, shelters, caregivers to facilitate action, dialogue and information sharing.
2. Coherent engagement of relevant authorities.

## GOAL NO. 3

### **Acceptance and tolerance of cats**


What we want to see happen

1. Clear definitions of pet cat ownership & community cat caregiving.
2. Raise the standard of cat ownership and caregiving through education and support.
3. Raise awareness and vigilance against animal abuse.
4. Eye-witnesses of animal abuse to come forward to assist in investigations leading to prosecution.

## GOAL NO. 4

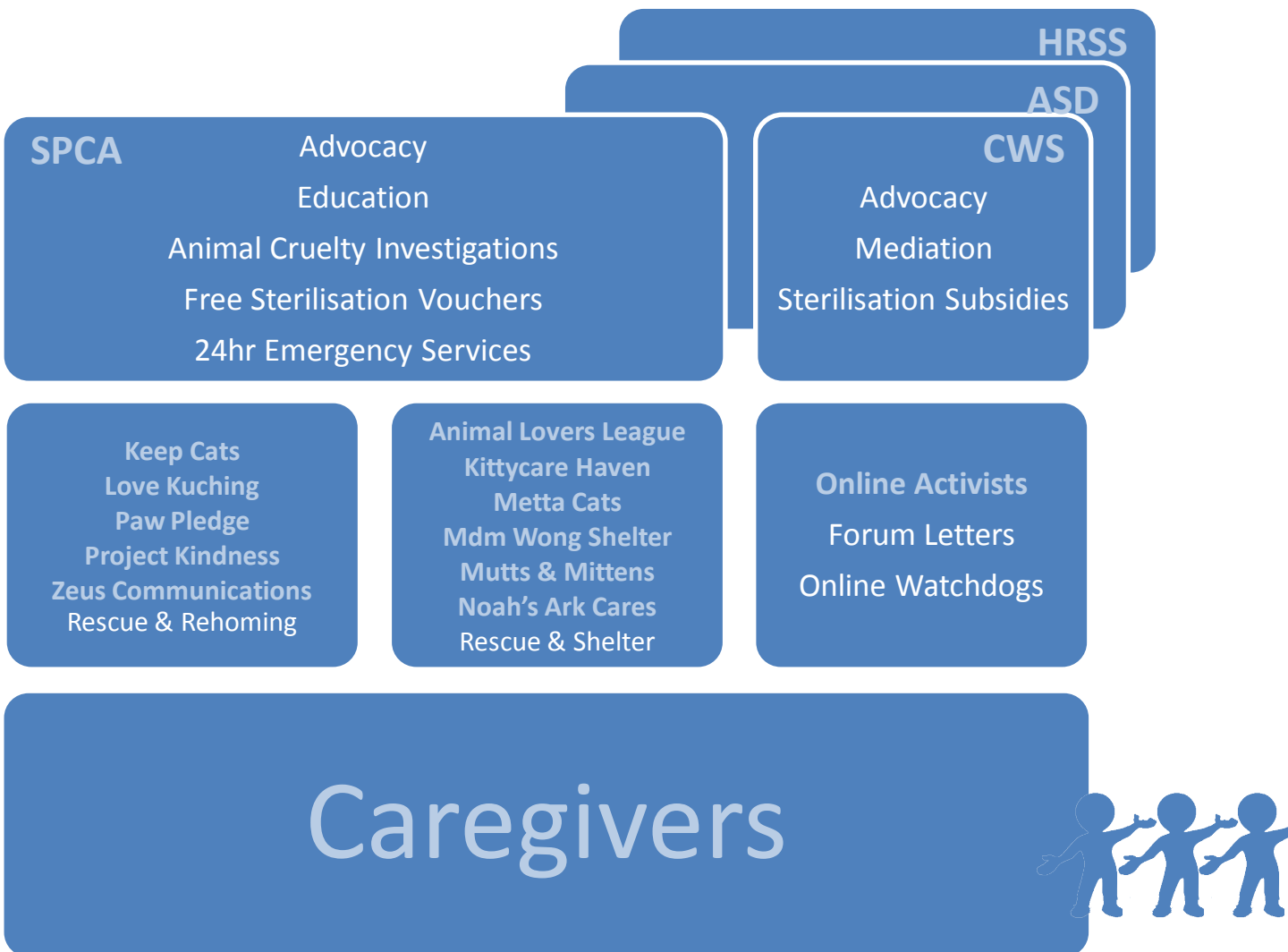
### **Better healthcare for pets and strays**

What we want to see happen

1. Low-cost sterilisation of pet and community animals
  2. A robust industry in affordable animal care.
  2. Education of owners, fosters and caregivers on basic caregiving.
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# Our local animal welfare ecosystem.

It takes a community to solve a community issue. There are various organisations, groups and individuals in Singapore who are applying themselves to improving the plight of stray animals but stray welfare is bigger than everyone put together. We need as many people as possible to get involved.





# It takes a community.

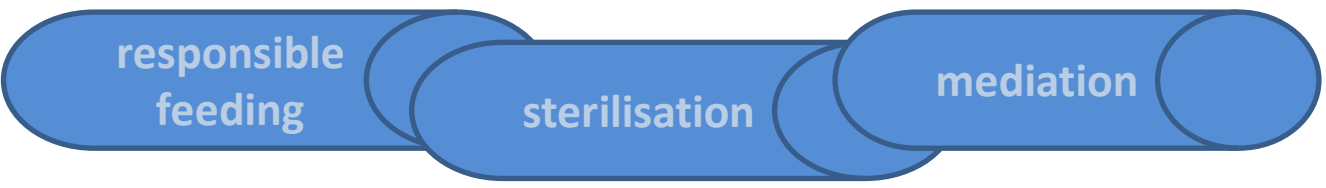
Community cats depend on the people in their community for their well-being. Even if caregiving is too much of a commitment for you now, you can help the community cats in the following ways:

- ❖ **Be your local neighbourhood animal watch.** Contact the Cat Welfare Society so that you can be informed or keep us informed of any cat issues in your area.
- ❖ **Befriend your local caregiver.** They are the people who feed the cats rain or shine. Some of them are wary of others because of their past experience with intolerant residents. But they deserve a friendly face for the tireless work they do. Be patient and they may open up to you.
- ❖ **Educate your neighbours** who may be feeding irresponsibly or letting their cats out to roam by talking to them or flyer-ing them with materials from the Cat Welfare Society.
- ❖ **Contribute to a sterilisation programme** through the Cat Welfare Society or help your local group of caregivers.
- ❖ **Foster a cat** that may need extra care due to illness or injury, or have a chance to be rehomed. But only take a cat off the street if it is absolutely necessary.
- ❖ **Join or organise a citizen patrol** in your neighbourhood if there are any cat abuse cases reported in your area.
- ❖ **Speak up for cats and caregivers** on print or online forum pages. Be brief, be polite and professional.



# Bridging the community.

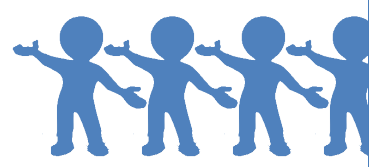
For those who feel strongly against the complaint-driven culling of cats, there is an important final pillar in an effective community cat management programme. That is mediation.

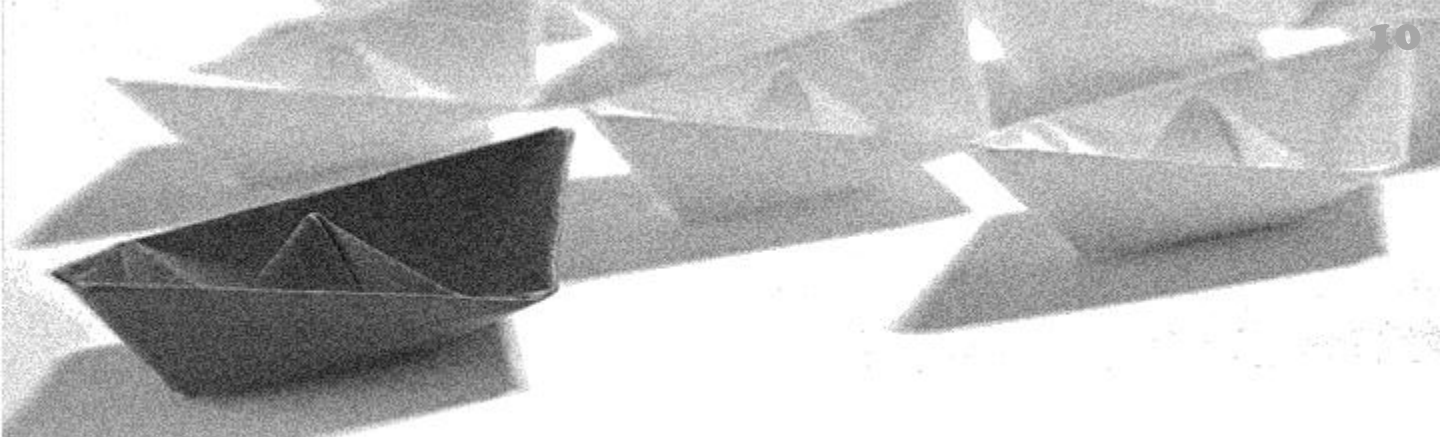


Most Town Councils would be happy to work with caregivers if they know that there are those who will actively help them resolve issues in the community. After all, they have a job to do in balancing the different interests in the community to make it a clean and pleasant environment for everyone.

A mediator is a reasonable, rational voice, a bridge between those who love animals and those who may not. It is not an easy role but an essential one without which the animals cannot be safeguarded.

Successful mediators come from all walks of life. They can be young or old, they are of different education levels, some do not even speak English! We live and learn and we get better with persistence and experience.

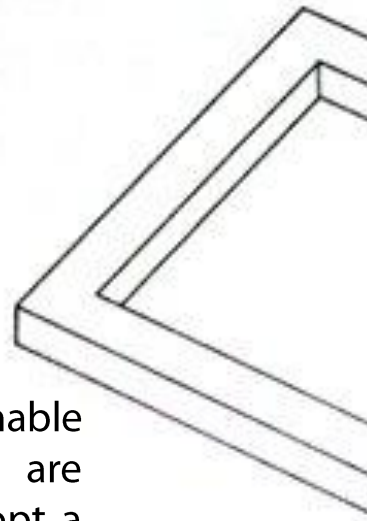


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- ❖ **Introduce yourself to your Town Council officer.** Let them know that you would like to assist them with cat-related complaints and connect them with the Cat Welfare Society. We will help to explain the cat management programme in your estate and the role of caregivers.
  - ❖ **Build a community.** Befriend as many cat-loving people in your estate - feeders, caregivers, cat owners. Ask the Cat Welfare Society if there are already listed caregivers in your estate.
  - ❖ **Arm yourself with information.** There is a wealth of information about animal welfare, stray management and cat care at our fingertips on the web. There are also many caregivers and mediators who are a walking wealth of information.
  - ❖ **Connect to our online community.** Seek out like-minded people though the Cat Welfare Society's Facebook page.
  - ❖ **Attend Cat Welfare Society's workshops.** Look out for our schedules on [www.catwelfare.org](http://www.catwelfare.org) and our Facebook page.



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For advice or assistance, contact the Cat Welfare Society at [info@catwelfare.org](mailto:info@catwelfare.org).

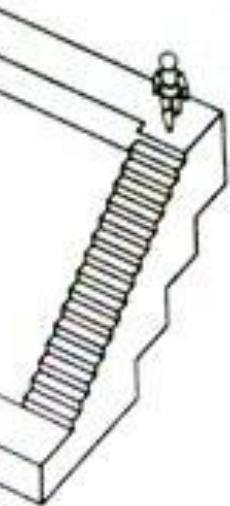


# Common solutions.

It is important to keep in mind that there are more reasonable people who just want their problems resolved than there are unreasonable ones who love to complain. When we adopt a calm manner and focus on achieving a win-win, we are better able to win over hearts and minds in our community.

- ❖ **Ask for details.** Find out what the problem is, the number of cats, the colour of cats and the exact location - block, street, unit, landmark, where applicable.
- ❖ **Analyse.** Figure out who is causing or encouraging the problem. Most issues are people-created and that is why removing the cats without addressing the human behaviours does not solve the problem.

Complaint	Solution
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Cat disturbances along corridors.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Likely to be roaming home cats. Work with officers and residents to identify, educate or warn cat owner. Use cat repellants on affected areas to deter cats.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Caterwauling and fighting.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Work with caregivers to sterilise any unsterilised community cats. Split the feeding stations of cats that do not get along.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Irresponsible feeding in inappropriate locations or leaving a mess.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Work with officers and residents to identify, educate or warn feeder. Ask Town Council to put up education posters.</li> </ul>



## Sticky issues.

Even with the best of efforts, there will be issues that cannot be fully resolved without extraordinary measures. These are situations in which we may have to make the difficult decision of safeguarding as many cats within our means and capacity while the authorities deal with the situation.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ No caregivers in a certain hotspot.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Raise awareness and resources and persuade other caregivers to expand their areas of responsibilities.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Chronic irresponsible feeding due to uncooperative feeders.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Collect evidence and bring matter to NEA.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Chronic abandonment due to uncooperative cat owners.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Collect evidence and bring matter to AVA. Relocate cats if numbers become unmanageable.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Animal hoarding resulting in too many cats, especially in poor condition.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Assist in sterilising cats and provide simple solutions to improve hygiene. Rehome or relocate cats if numbers are unmanageable.</li> </ul>

Then there are unreasonable complaints calling for removal of cats based on phobias, exaggerated property damage or health risks.

Most Town Councils already recognise that they need to balance both parties. As human nature goes, officers are more likely to take the side of the reasonable. Therefore, stay calm and focus on providing known facts, success stories and solutions.

# Education is the best prevention.

National education like Kindness, Littering, Courtesy campaigns are great but they do not reach everyone, no matter how often they are splashed across newspapers and on TV screens. For many people, the message hits home only when faced with peer pressure or when they are caught in the act.

As such, it makes sense to use ground tactics to bring our message about responsible feeding, responsible cat ownership, abuse and abandonment across . This creates peer pressure in the community.

- ❖ **Organise door to door teams** to speak to residents and flyer hotspots.
- ❖ **Seek Town Council's assistance** in putting up posters in the estate.
- ❖ **Engage your local Resident's Committee** by joining them or asking for opportunities to conduct pet-related talks or events in the community.
- ❖ **Ask local pet shops and vet clinics** to spread the message through posters or flyers.
- ❖ **Lead by example** on the responsible way to care for community cats and to keep cats as pets.



# Preventing burnout.

Animal welfare caregivers and advocates immerse themselves in their work with great expectations for improving the plight of animals. Facing daily and unexpected crisis, they often become overwhelmed with the magnitude of the problem and discouraged with the limited results they see and with the obstacles that remain. As a result, animal advocates and caregivers make personal sacrifices and work harder, leading to emotional exhaustion, negative attitudes, and feelings of low self-accomplishment. These are symptoms of burnout.

The key to preventing burnout is self-care. Does your animal companion politely wait for you before devouring his breakfast? Does your cat give consideration to what you are doing before jumping up on your lap? Have you ever seen a cat with "burnout" from giving too much? Animals intuitively ask for and take what they need. These acts of self-care enable them to naturally and freely give to others. This natural wisdom displayed by our furry friends is the secret to giving that replenishes rather than depletes.

**Replenish yourself every day.** Slow down. Take a few extra few minutes to rest. Confide in a friend.

**Honor your personal style.** If one part of animal rescue is stressing you out, look to apply your talents to some other aspects of the same cause.

**Give yourself a break — away!** Take time away from your work and make time for other interests.

**Embrace the present.** Fully enjoy that special connectedness that you feel with the animals and your fellow animal lovers. Although we may not always get to see the fruits of our work, we need to trust that the results of our authentic effort — no matter how small they may appear to be — contribute to that greater vision for which we are striving.

Adapted from Linda Harper, PSYETA NEWS

## **Quick guide to relevant contacts**

Agri-Food & Veterinary Authority of Singapore

**ava\_cawc@ava.gov.sg**

Cat Welfare Society **info@catwelfare.org**

Community Mediation Centre **mlaw\_hq\_cmc@mlaw.gov.sg**

National Environment Agency **contact\_nea@nea.gov.sg**

Society of the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals

**enquiries@sPCA.org.sg**

Animal abuse/Emergency

Police **999**

SPCA **62875355 ext 9**

AVA **6471 9996 / 6471 7198** (office hours)

### **Neighbourhood Contact**

