



STRONG HEARTS

cat rescue

foster carer

ONBOARDING INFORMATION

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About Strong Hearts

Strong Hearts is a registered charity based in Victoria, Australia. We have expanded into rescuing farmed animals, cats, dogs and rabbits.

We rescue kill-listed cats and kittens from local and rural pounds and then desex, microchip and vaccinate them before adopting them out to loving, forever homes.

We have a wonderful team of volunteer staff and foster carers throughout Melbourne, who look after our rescue cats until they are adopted. We also have an team of amazing vets who support our work, and provide exceptional care to our rescue cats and kittens.

We believe that all breeds of cats deserve loving and caring homes and any medical care necessary to ensure the best possible quality of life, regardless of their age or condition.

Through our work, we also seek to educate the community on:

- responsible companion animal guardianship,
- holistic cat health care management,
- the dire situation of thousands of healthy cats and kittens being euthanised everyday in Australia,
- and most importantly what can be done to prevent this from happening.

Foreword

Thank you so much for becoming a foster carer and joining our team. Fostering is very rewarding and one of the most crucial roles for many homeless animals. Fostering does quite literally save lives and you will be supported throughout your entire fostering journey.

We put our trust in a network of foster carers to provide a warm, nurturing environment in which cats thrive in to prepare themselves for a forever home.

Many of our requirements are legal obligations under the Victorian Domestic Animals Act and The Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1986 (POCTA Act).

By agreeing to foster on behalf of Strong Hearts Cats Rescue (SHCR) you commit to follow our instructions and rules to ensure we are compliant with state and federal requirements, and most importantly, that the cat in your care is safe and happy.

Preparation

Once you have been advised that you are approved to foster a cat or kittens, we will arrange for the drop off or collection of your fosters.

Here is a list of supplies you will need to have organised at your home prior to your foster cat's arrival.

- Bedding
- Food
- Toys
- Toilet facilities

The following are ideal, but not absolutely required:

- Carrier
- Crate, playpen or crate.

Further detail on these supplies can be found in the following pages.



Bedding

There are lots of cat beds available for purchase, but generally speaking, cats can sleep anywhere. It is always preferred to give them a space of their own in the early days, like a spare bedroom, study, even a bathroom will do. Other things to help make them comfortable are pillows and blankets, things that are cozy. Basically things that can easily be washed after the cat departs for their forever home!

Other bedding items are nice to have but not essential.

OPTIONAL: CRATES, TENTS AND PLAYPENS

Crates, tents and playpens are great when transitioning cats and kittens into their new foster home – especially for hyperactive kittens that you don't want to lose track of! We have found spicy or scaredy cats appreciate the smaller space as they can make their own 'safe space' and it helps them to destress. If you ever need to quarantine a cat or discourage physical activity after a surgery, they are also great for that.

In most cases these are a 'nice to have', so don't worry if you don't have one. Strong Hearts have a small number of crates in circulation but are usually in use by litters of kittens not ready to be fostered yet. If you feel like your cat would benefit from one of these, please get in touch with your Strong Hearts coordinator.

If you are thinking that fostering is something you'd like to do long-term, then you may wish to consider investing in one of these. Here is a link to a relatively cheap one:

<https://www.kmart.com.au/product/pet-folding-crate-extra-large-42756712/>



Food

In most instances, we ask that you (the Foster Carer) provide food for the cat while they are temporarily in your care. All the supplies you can provide yourself is a huge financial help to Strong Hearts as these funds can be re-distributed to desperately needed medical care/treatment. We do however understand that food is costly and can support you by providing food upon request.

We recommend the following brands with some links for ease of purchase to Pet Circle, however these brands should be available at most pet shop retailers.

Kitten (Under 4 months of age – not desexed)

Type of food / brand	Link	Cost*
Mother and Bay Dry Cat Food <i>Royal Canin</i>	https://www.petcircle.com.au/product/royal-canin-mother-and-baby-dry-cat-food/rc22771	\$66 4kg
Mother And Baby Stage 2 Wet Cat Food Trays <i>Royal Canin</i>	https://www.petcircle.com.au/product/royal-canin-mother-and-baby-stage-2-wet-cat-food-trays/rcbc894ms	\$52 24 trays

*Cost dependent on retailer

Pregnant or recent new mum (Queen)

Type of food / brand	Link	Cost*
Mother and Bay Dry Cat Food <i>Royal Canin</i>	https://www.petcircle.com.au/product/royal-canin-mother-and-baby-dry-cat-food/rc22771	\$66 4kg
Mother And Baby Stage 2 Wet Cat Food Trays <i>Royal Canin</i>	https://www.petcircle.com.au/product/royal-canin-mother-and-baby-stage-2-wet-cat-food-trays/rcbc894ms	\$52 24 trays

*Cost dependent on retailer

Kitten (4-12 months of age – desexed)

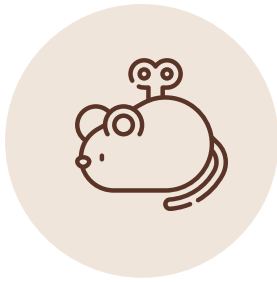
Type of food / brand	Link	Cost*
Kitten Dry Cat Food <i>Royal Canin</i>	https://www.petcircle.com.au/product/royal-canin-kitten-dry-cat-food/rc41650	\$37 (2kg)
Kitten Instinctive Wet Cat Food Pouches <i>Royal Canin</i>	https://www.petcircle.com.au/product/royal-canin-kitten-instinctive-gravy-wet-cat-food-pouches/rcvp031	\$30 (12 sachets)
Dry Kitten Food <i>Black Hawk</i>	https://www.petcircle.com.au/product/black-hawk-chicken-and-rice-dry-kitten-food/bh230	\$28 (1.5kg)
Grain Free Kitten Chicken Pouches <i>Black Hawk</i>	https://www.petcircle.com.au/product/black-hawk-grain-free-kitten-chicken-with-peas-broth-and-gravy-pouches/bhc500	\$26 (12 pouches)
Kitten Indoor Dry Cat Food <i>Hills Science Diet</i>	https://www.petcircle.com.au/product/hills-science-diet-kitten-indoor-dry-cat-food/h9378	\$68 (3kg)
Kitten Cat Food Pouches <i>Hills Science Diet</i>	https://www.petcircle.com.au/product/hills-science-diet-kitten-chicken-cat-food-pouches/11093lg	\$34 (12 pouches)

*Cost dependent on retailer

Adult / Senior (1 year +)

Type of food / brand	Link	Cost*
Indoor Adult Dry Cat Food <i>Royal Canin</i>	https://www.petcircle.com.au/product/royal-canin-indoor-adult-dry-cat-food/rc42423	\$38 (2kg)
Indoor Adult Wet Cat Food Pouches <i>Royal Canin</i>	https://www.petcircle.com.au/product/royal-canin-indoor-adult-jelly-wet-cat-food-pouches/cc68h	\$28 (12 sachets)
Dry Cat Food Adult <i>Black Hawk</i>	https://www.petcircle.com.au/product/black-hawk-dry-cat-food-adult-chicken-and-rice/cpb0010	\$29 (1.5kg)
Grain Free Adult Pouches <i>Black Hawk</i>	https://www.petcircle.com.au/product/black-hawk-grain-free-adult-cat-chicken-with-peas-broth-and-gravy-pouches/bhc502	\$26 (12 pouches)
Adult Cat Dry Food <i>Hills Science Diet</i>	https://www.petcircle.com.au/product/hills-science-diet-adult-cat-dry-food/h603820	\$49 (2kg)
Adult Perfect Weight Cat Food Pouches <i>Hills Science Diet</i>	https://www.petcircle.com.au/product/hills-science-diet-adult-perfect-weight-cat-food-pouches/11102lg	\$34 (12 pouches)

*Cost dependent on retailer



Toys

If you have had a cat before, you will know that to them – almost anything is a toy! Play with toys is really important, in particular for younger cats as it stimulates them, develops their hunting instincts, and also provides exercise. Having cat-proof toys available helps you to bond with the cat, and also protects your furniture/belongings from harm. Not to mention bored cats can be incredibly destructive!

Choosing cat toys isn't hard, as long as you are purchasing toys specifically designed for cats (e.g. no small things that could fall off, then ingest and choke on etc.). All pet shop retailers and even most supermarkets these days have a pet toy section that would have suitable toys. Go wild!

Cat scratcher

We would highly recommend you invest in at least one cat scratcher. These are available fairly cheaply from pet shop retailers or online.

You may find that if you are looking after an older or senior cat they are less interested in playing with toys, and that's okay. But there are very few cats out there, that despite their age don't enjoy a good scratching post.



Toilet facilities

As your foster cat will be an inside-only cat, you need to make sure they have a litter box and kitty litter available. General advice on litter boxes is that for every one cat, you need between 1-2 litter boxes. If the cat is alone in a crate, then of course just 1 litter box is fine. But if you get to the stage where the cat is free roaming around the house, you need to think about it like this: if a door slams shut unexpectedly and the cat is on one side, and the litter box is on another, where do you think it's going to poop?

Litter

There are many types of cat litter you can choose from, clumping, non-clumping, recycled paper, tofu, clay, wood etc. Every cat parent has their own preferences. There are many arguments for and against all of these, so feel free to do your own research and make the right decision for you and your foster cat.

If you really aren't fussed and just want something low cost and convenient, Breeder's Choice is around \$15 for 15 litres and can be purchased at the supermarket or pet retailer.

Most litters cannot be flushed down the toilet! If you were hoping you could do that, make sure you check the label and consider the environment before doing so.

Warning

Some of the litters that come in crystals can be toxic to kittens if they eat them so please avoid them.

Litter trays / boxes

Similar to litter, litter trays and boxes are really a personal preference for the cat carer and the nature/age of the cat.



Litter tray

Cheap, can usually be purchased at the supermarket, good for kittens (ideally low walls so they can easily climb in).



Hooded box with door

Entry level cost between \$50-\$150. Good for messy cats who like to dig, as well as cats who get a bit of stage fright, good for litter boxes that have to be in a living room or bedroom as they are better at trapping in the smell.



For those who want to try limit the litter scattered across the house

Certainly not a necessity, but these litter mats are great to tuck under litter boxes or trays so they catch the litter off the cats paws and trap it in the mat, rather than it get trodden all over the house. Not 100% effective, but better than nothing.

Because Strong Hearts cares about the environment, we don't recommend litter box liners that aren't recyclable. In fact, they're a bit of a waste of time! We wouldn't even recommend recyclable liners. You shouldn't need them if you are purchasing decent litter.

Whatever you do – don't forget to buy the scoop too!



Carrier

In most cases, you will pick up your foster cat (or have it dropped off to you) in a Strong Hearts owned carrier. The issue is, we need all the carriers we can access readily available to do transport runs to rescue the cats and kittens in from the euthanasia/kill lists. It's for this reason we ask that our Foster Carers either come and collect the cat with their own carrier, or return the carrier as soon as possible to your Strong Hearts coordinator.

It's always good to have a carrier on-hand in case of an emergency, but usually there is a Strong Hearts coordinator in your area located close by that could come to the rescue with a carrier if needed.

If you are looking to purchase a carrier, just make sure that it is fully enclosed and sturdy so they can't escape!

Fostering

Isolation / Quarantine

Prior to your foster cat arriving at your home, we will specify if the cat requires a period of strict isolation or quarantine. This process is critical if you have existing cats or pets at home.

Usually the isolation period is 14-days. During this time we recommend the cat be isolated from any other household pets, furniture and carpets (if possible). We find the best place for them is somewhere like a bathroom or spare bedroom that you can keep secure.

The two most common diseases in rescue are:

- **Ringworm** – is a contagious fungal infection which starts as hair loss, often in a circular pattern, it then becomes crusty (often on the face and/or tail but can be elsewhere on the body)
- **Cat flu** – symptoms are watery eyes, sneezing and/or nasal discharge.

We will always disclose (if we are aware) that the cat we are transferring you has any of these symptoms or we suspect they may have these conditions.

Socialisation

This may seem obvious, but cats can only get better with humans and will be ready for adoption sooner if you put in the work and spend time with it, trying to socialise it with you and your other pets. It may take days, weeks, months for the cat to warm up to you, but if you don't put in the work and keep trying, we guarantee you won't get the reward.

As a foster carer, your job is to do your best to help the cat find comfort, love and learn to trust humans.

This website has some really terrific tips to help you socialise and understand the behaviour of your cat: <http://www.scaredycats.com.au/>

Foster Carer Facebook support chat

Upon the arrival of your first foster cat, you will be invited to our exclusive Foster Carer Facebook support chat group.

Communication is super important when fostering. Questions are fantastic and always encouraged. There is no such thing as a silly question! If you are concerned, or have any questions please reach out to your Strong Hearts Coordinator or write it in the support group chat. It's also a great place to share pictures of your cats with the rest of the group and provide tips and tricks to each other. Teamwork makes the dream work!

The Foster Carer Facebook support chat is a fantastic tool. It's a group filled with people going through the exact same things you are, all with varying levels of experience and success. It's a safe space and we encourage you to use it as much as you need and feel comfortable doing so.

Weekly check-ins

Once per week, we legally require you to provide us with an update on your foster cat. Ideally, this includes an updated picture and written update on how the cat is going in your care, any changes in temperament, how it's getting along with other pets in your household, how it's getting along with you and your other family members etc.

The weekly check-in isn't only for the cats welfare, it is also a welfare check on you! Sometimes foster caring can be tough, we know that. You can try and try and a cat can just continue to be stubborn and not come out from under the bed, and sometimes that wears you down a bit and makes you feel a bit flat. Those feelings of "failure" are perfectly normal and every single one of our team members have experienced that.

We're here to ensure every one of our foster carers is supported so that they can care for and support their foster cat.

If you forget to reach out to us at least once per week, don't worry – you'll find a Strong Hearts Coordinator will be in touch with you anyway to touch base.

Promotional materials

While the cat is in your care, we ask that you keep us updated with regular pictures and videos. We use all of the cute photos and videos to post on their Pet Rescue page to help them find their forever home. The more content you have, the better! Pictures of them sleeping, playing, in their favourite spot, that bring out their personality.

Usually our adoption coordinators stitch together all of the feedback and comments you have provided over the cats stay with you to help prepare the Pet Rescue post, but if you are able to help us write 2-3 sentences to help prospective families get to know the temperament and personality of the cat, we would be very grateful.

Transport

While it is incredibly advantageous for you to have access to a car while foster caring, it isn't essential.

Having access to your own personal car certainly helps us as it means you are able to drive the cat to any veterinary appointments, or drop them off to Adoption Day events we are hosting.

It also comes in very handy in the event of an emergency with the cat, so that you can get them to the vet quickly.

While fostering, you may be required to take the cat for their desexing and pick up same day. They must be in an enclosed and secure cat carrier whenever leaving your house.

Adoption Days

A roundabout once a month, Strong Hearts hosts an Adoption Day. These are usually hosted out of a PETstock store, commonly East Brighton or Hawthorn.

Adoption Days are a hugely successful way to showcase as many of the cats we have in our care as possible, and invite the community to come and see them and hopefully take one (or more!) home to their forever home.

We will contact you with 7-14 days notice about an upcoming Adoption Day and its location and will let you know if we would really like the cat you are caring for to be in attendance. It would be great if you could drop the cat off at the event on the day, and pick it up if the cat unfortunately hasn't been adopted.

In some cases, we have Adoption Coordinators travelling past your area and they may be able to collect and drop off the cat one way or both. Either way, please let us know which suits and we will do our best to accommodate.

Adoption Process

Once your cat has been fully vetted we will start the adoption process.

Meet & Greets

Using the details and photos you provide we will set up profiles on Pet Rescue and start looking for suitable and beautiful homes for the cat(s) in your care.

Applicants fill in an online form asking a series of questions to help us determine whether they are a suitable cat owner, and also suitable to adopt this particular cat.

Once the application has been reviewed by our adoption team, applicants with outstanding applications are interviewed by phone.

If the call goes well, one of our Adoption Coordinators will reach out to you to organise a Meet & Greet. Meet & Greets are an opportunity for potential adoptive parents to meet the cat prior to adoption. These are a great opportunity to see how the person connects with the cat, and vice versa. These Meet & Greets are usually hosted at the Foster Carers home, so as a third and final check we rely on you as the Foster Carer to make sure this person seems like the 'right fit' for the cat you have been caring for.

If the Meet & Greet goes well, the adoption can take place on the day. As the Strong Hearts Adoption Coordinator is unlikely to be present at the Meet & Greet, we will rely on you to help facilitate the adoption.

How you can help facilitate the adoption:

- The Adoption Coordinator will have already sent through the Strong Hearts payment details to the prospective parents (the person looking to adopt).
- So that you are aware, the adoption fee for kittens up to 1 year old is \$350, adults over 1 is \$200.
- We ask that the person adopting the cat show you proof of payment if they are taking the cat home that day. We also require them to take a screenshot of the proof of payment and send it to Strong Hearts via email.
- Once you have been shown proof of payment and they have sent the receipt to the Adoption Coordinator, they are free to take the cat home in the cat carrier they brought.

- This will be explained in the email to the adopter, but Strong Hearts will email through all vet paperwork (desexing certificate, vaccination history, microchip details and change of owner forms) to them within 5-7 days.

If the 'fit' doesn't seem quite right

Our Adoption Coordinators do conduct very thorough screening of all of our potential adoptive families, but sometimes the lack of suitability of a candidate doesn't become apparent until you see the person with the cat, or meet them in person.

If you feel as though this person isn't the right fit for this cat, but they are expressing strong interest in adopting this cat and taking it home, please feel free to do the following:

- **IF YOU FEEL COMFORTABLE:** You can discuss with the applicant that you feel like this might not be the best fit after all, and will speak to one of the Strong Hearts Adoption Coordinators at finding a cat better suited to them.
- **IF YOU'D PREFER WE HANDLE IT:** Take yourself to a private space and send us a message or give us a call. If you can't reach your Adoption Coordinator, message the Foster Cat and ask to speak to an admin urgently about a Meet & Greet taking place at your house.
 - We will take it from there and walk through next steps with you, which will most likely involve calling the applicant.
 - What you can do in the meantime is say that you've spoken to a representative from Strong Hearts and that we (Strong Hearts) are going to give them a call to discuss next steps. You can suggest this call is best taken from their car for privacy or outside.

After adoption

Saying goodbye is bittersweet, however it is important to remember that your goodbye is their hello to a long and beautiful life in a loving home, and then you have space to save another life. Adopting saves one life, fostering saves hundreds.

We are always seeking competent Foster Carers to provide care to our cats. Once your cat has been adopted, please let us know if you would consider taking on another cat as a foster, if you need a little bit of a pause in-between or if you think this was a one-off thing.

Foster Failing

If you fall completely in love with one of your foster cats please let your Strong Hearts Coordinator or a team member know.

The adoption fee for kittens up to 1 year old is \$350, adults over 1 is \$200. This is to help go towards vet work, supplies and the running of the rescue. Like you, the entire team is a volunteer run organisation that relies solely on adoption fees and donations to continue saving lives.

Urgent Contact

We hope that your foster caring experience is a straightforward and easy one. Unfortunately, however, sometimes the cats that we rescue come with a few health or temperament issues that can pop up during their stay with you.

Here are a few instances where we would really appreciate you getting in touch with one of the Strong Hearts team members immediately:

- Vomiting or diarrhoea
- Any weight loss
- If kitten become lethargic, cool or warm to the touch
- Not eating
- Not toileting
- Skin infections (starts as hair loss, often in a circular pattern)
- Watery eyes, sneezing and/or nasal discharge
- Pussy, weeping or suspected infected wounds (if had recent surgery for example de-sexing)
- Cat has escaped their secure area and is lost
- Cat has become severely injured or hurt

Any unusual behaviour, anything that concerns you, concerns us. It is always best practice to reach out immediately if you have even the slightest of concerns.

DO THIS

1. Message your Strong Hearts coordinator via direct message on Facebook.
2. If no response within an hour (depending on the severity of the issue), direct message the Foster Cats chat group and ask for an admin to contact you privately.

Vet appointments

Strong Hearts have a pre-approved list of vet clinics that provide care to our cats. If you have reported an illness or concern about one of the cats in your care, Strong Hearts will arrange to book an appointment with one of our partnered vet clinics.

While you think you are trying to be helpful, we ask that you please do not book the cat in to your local vet, or try to book the cat into one of our pre-approved vets yourself.

As a registered rescue, we are required to follow certain legislated procedures and it is essential that a Strong Hearts administrator organises this appointment and books it through the proper channels we have in place.

Here is a link to all of our current vet partners:
<https://www.strongheartscats.com/vetpartners>

Emergencies

If the matter is life or death and there is no time to waste, and you cannot reach a member of the Strong Hearts administration we ask that you please head directly to:

Meow Veterinary Hospital

Phone: 8725 0727

Address: 7/1050 Thompsons Road, Cranbourne West VIC

Hours of operation: 9am-5pm Monday-Friday - closed on the weekend

Failing this, and if you are experiencing an emergency and Meow Veterinary Hospital is closed, please take your foster cat to your closest emergency vet.

Turns out foster caring isn't for me / this cat isn't for me

That's okay. These things happen.

Please contact your Strong Hearts coordinator as soon as you make this decision. Please be mindful, Strong Hearts is run solely on the goodwill of volunteers who dedicate as much time as they can to the rescue, but they do have other jobs and family commitments. We will do our best to re-home the cat as soon as possible but please be aware this may take us 5-7 days to find another temporary home. We just ask for your patience while we do this.