

Landlord says no pets? Tenants can foster or socialize animals

By Esther O. Perez

The "no pets" policy has been a well-known regulation since the first residents moved into Peter Cooper Village and Stuyvesant Town, but it's also an open secret that many tenants still have birds, cats and in a handful of cases, dogs. For those who choose not to break the rules, there are other ways that ST-PCV animal lovers can have furry friends without owning them.

One way is to do some volunteer work for local animal rescue groups such as Bide-A-Wee on 38th Street, KittyKind at Petco in Union Square, City Critters at the Petco on 31st Street, Earth Angels, which cares for dogs at Petco in Union Square; and the ASPCA, which handles adoptions from its 92nd Street adoption center.

All these facilities are in need of volunteers.

"Most volunteers either walk the dogs or socialize the cats, because we try to give each animal individual attention after being in a cage all day. It's our way of making sure that the animals are adoptable," said Debra Green, director of Bide-A-Wee. The volunteers can also lend a helping hand on outreach days, usually held on weekends, where the animals are either taken out to parks or put on display in some way in order to give them more visibility for adoption.

Becoming a volunteer has certain regulations however, and each organization has its own guidelines. Bide-A-Wee, for example, has its volunteers fill out an application, and come to an orientation. In addition, a staff member individually mentors prospective volunteers.

"We need to make sure that each volunteer knows how to care

for the animals," said Green, whose organization color coordinates the level of experience that the volunteers gain. All volunteers have to be over the age of 18 and Bide-A-Wee asks that they commit at least six months to them, in which they have to put in a minimum of six hours. "We want people who can be serious about volunteering, because we invest so much staff time on training, so if we're committed we want them to be committed," said Green.

Another way to spend time with an animal without having a life-long commitment is to foster. As a foster parent for a pet, a pet lover can experience caring for a pet until they find homes. Although sometimes the adoption process may be lengthy, the animal's presence is only temporary and therefore not technically breaking pet-ownership rules. "In terms of foster care, summertime is kitten season. It rains and pours kittens," said Hilary Harris, director of KittyKind. "People are constantly leaving us boxes of kittens. We need foster homes desperately, not only for kittens but for cats as well who get upset in the store setting," she added.

Those who foster sometimes end up adopting, but for those who live in buildings where that is not allowed, fostering is the next best thing. "There is no commitment. People can go on vacation and bring the cat back to us, and when they come back, they can start fostering again.

It's really flexible," said Harris.

In some cases, companion animals can be prescribed to people from their doctors. Other than just service dogs, for example, for the blind or physically disabled, pets can do wonders for mental and overall health.

"Cats and dogs have been known to lower blood pressure," said Harris. "Pets can also help depression. They give you a reason to get up in the morning, have some-

thing to pet, feed, and take care of, and that's a very important thing."

Bide-A-Wee even offers therapy readings, where children who are usually shy or have trouble reading out loud, read happily to their non-judgmental canine listener. "It is a program that is done all over the country, and it helps children come out of their shell," said Green.

There is one other law that can help a tenant keep his or her pet—and apartment—which is commonly known as the "pet law." The law states that if the landlord fails to enforce the "no pet" clause within three months of a tenant's open and notorious harboring of a pet, then such a clause is deemed void. Basically, this means if you don't hide your pet and get away with it for a period of three months and you have proof that it has been there that long, your pet is safe.

But heed warning, because according to newyorktails.com, "pushing the pet envelope if you're in a tasty, rent-controlled or rent-stabilized apartment where the landlord may be waiting for an excuse to get you out," might not be the wisest move.

If you do end up with a pet-related court date, the ASPCA offers a lot of information on what to do, and there are also New York City pet housing attorneys.