

My name is Mardi McMahon and I became a volunteer with the AZ Humane Society (AHS) early in 2010. The process for becoming a volunteer is quite extensive and after the 5<sup>th</sup> instructional class, I was eager to start working with the animals. The AHS is a nonprofit animal welfare agency that has been serving the community since 1957. They are the only organization that operates an Emergency Animal Medical Technician program and the largest shelter-based trauma center for homeless animals in the Southwest.

While I was attending the various instructional courses volunteers are required to attend, I learned that I would become one of the over 1,400 people who donate their time and compassion to animals in our community. There are several ways in which a volunteer can help at the AHS. I chose to spend my time at various Petsmart locations running the adoptions and finding animals their “forever” homes.

I find the adoption process so rewarding! Not only am I the advocate for those animals, but I find myself educating people along the way. For instance, one day I was at the Goodyear Petsmart and we had a beautiful grey Pitbull up for adoption. He was so good natured, yet I heard some people say he looked scary when they walked by him. I decided to take him out of the kennel, put him on a leash, and have him sit/lay by me. By doing that simple act, he was able to interact with passersby and it was easier to display how gentle and friendly he was.

Another thing I learned while attending the instructional courses, is that they need foster parents! I didn't understand the foster process at all, so when I heard that

many of the animals just need a safe and loving place to stay for a few weeks, I decided to learn more. AHS often has animals with kennel cough (dogs), and Upper Respiratory Infection (cats), as well as animals who are stressed by being in the shelter environment, and/or are underweight or injured. I have two cats in my home, so taking in a sick cat isn't an option. I asked around and found out that there are many other situations in which I can foster animals without putting my pets in danger. I have fostered three kittens who were underweight and too young to alter before adoption, an adult male cat who had many teeth extracted and had to be given medicine for 21 days, and I am now fostering a 6 week old male kitten who is underweight and too young to alter. All of the animals I have fostered have been adopted within one week of being put up for adoption.

Fostering allows me the pleasure of having kittens in the house again without the commitment of having a houseful of adult cats after the kitten stage is over. I tell my friends it's similar to having the grandkids come for a visit. You get the fun of having a youngster in the house, but you can give them back when you're done with them! The first set of 3 kittens were scared when I brought them home, but after giving them plenty of love and a safe place to sleep and play, they were happy, purring little fellows – ready to adopt! I admit, I cried when I brought them back to AHS. Not because I was sad for them, but because I'd grown to love them as my own and was sad for me! Having a steady stream of foster pets come through my house has made taking them back easier. I'm certain if I didn't volunteer with AHS, I would become "The Crazy Cat Lady"!