

# Language of Love

A United Nations of Volunteers Helps Felines In New York City

By Beverly Wilson

Eyes meet, hearts race, lips smile! No words are needed. This is that special language – the language of love. But the people speaking it are not couples in a romantic restaurant. They are the cat lovers and volunteers at KittyKind, a no-kill rescue group located at the Union Square PETCO in New York City. Their mission is to relieve cats of their suffering and provide food, shelter, medical care and comfort for them until they are placed in a safe and loving home.

## Diversity-Volunteers

KittyKind is a United Nations of volunteers, representing almost every demographic and ethnicity that New York has to offer. Young, old, male, female - the volunteers range from ages 13 to 72 and their occupations run the gamut from architect to belly dancer. The common ground that they all share is an overwhelming love for cats.

The rescued cats at KittyKind evoke many emotions in the volunteers who work there, the strongest being the need to help and nurture. The volunteers also discover that even though their backgrounds are diverse they share similar struggles. Some have parents who came to New York to escape oppression; some are first-generation Americans themselves, struggling with the English language. Others have recently moved to New York, without friends or family and have found themselves in comparable situations with the animals they help.

New Yorkers are busy, stressed and constantly on the go. Lots of competing demands are intertwined with their everyday lives. The commitment of the volunteers is contagious and a result of the euphoric atmosphere they experience at KittyKind on a daily basis. Volunteers state that they saw the elation and dedication of the people at KittyKind, and wanted to be a part of this dynamic community.

KittyKind makes all volunteers feel welcome by having luncheons and exchanging news on an electronic bulletin board. They become friends with one another and socialize after their shifts, even visiting the cats and other volunteers during their off time. The love that the cats reciprocate to their caregivers is just as important to a volunteer as a paycheck or 401K plan.

## Diversity-Volunteer Responsibilities

KittyKind has many volunteer positions, from adoption representatives to foster care and medical volunteers, to fund-raisers and rescuers. Everyone works for and is inspired by the director, Marlene Kess. Kess has three ears – right, left, and cell phone. She's a problem solver, constantly on the phone and dealing with every known quandary that might arise.

## Diversity-Fund Raising

As a registered New York State 501K3 charity, KittyKind has no funding of its own and relies on public donations for food and medical care. The medical and veterinarian bills are overwhelming, more than \$25,000 a year.

To raise money, KittyKind asks for donations for its tote bags and other items available on their website. They also write grants and seek corporate discounts. A wonderful relationship with a leading animal talent agency occasionally leads to a "gig" for a lucky feline who walks the "cat walk," posing for print ads. All the money goes to help another cat at the adoption center or in a foster home.

## Diversity-Adopters

One can never predict what exactly draws a person to a particular cat and vice versa. The burliest men adopt the tiniest kittens, and petite women adopt linebacker tabbies. Families, couples and singles all bring in photos to KittyKind and tell wonderful stories of how their new cat took over their homes, and their hearts. Some are so taken with the experience that they return to adopt a "friend" for their present cat. Many KittyKind feline residents even develop a fan club during their stay, receiving numerous visits from PETCO customers and volunteers. Often, volunteers will fall in love with one of the cats and adopt one themselves.

## Diversity-The Cats

Abyssinian, Persian or Siamese – every known cat breed, big and small has meowed at KittyKind and each has a unique personality and background. Some of the cats have just arrived from a home because the owner is moving to a new place that won't accept cats. Many cats come to KittyKind because the roommate, domestic partner or baby is allergic. Some cats have lived on the streets for years, starving and sick while others have been neglected in pet stores.

Love is a language unto itself, crossing ethnicities, cultures and species. No one knows this better than the people who volunteer their love and time to helping cats get a second (or third or fourth) chance at a healthy and happy life. This is the language of the KittyKind community.

*KittyKind is always in need of help in a variety of ways. For more information on adoption, donating or volunteering, visit their website at [www.kittykind.org](http://www.kittykind.org)*