

A close-up photograph of a man with a grey beard and a blue shirt, smiling and holding a ginger and white tabby cat. The cat has green eyes and is looking directly at the camera. The background is a light blue wall with a window showing a view of a building.

Gobi, the memorable mog

A passion for cats

*Andy McPhee is at the front line
of cat care... and loves it!*

I've been a full-time cat care assistant at Cats Protection Glasgow Adoption Centre for 12 years now. Cats have always been a part of my world since before I can remember and I guess I always felt a kind of affinity with them. Growing up we took in many waifs and strays over the years and each one was an important member of our family and nothing less. I think I mostly take my love of animals from my mum – if it moved she fed it, regardless of the number of legs!

I had previously been working in high street retail for about 14 years and although I made very good friends, the job itself was sucking my will to live. I needed to do something that I believed in and meant more to me than simply paying the bills. A friend drew my attention to the vacancy at the centre and I was lucky enough to be taken in and made part of the team. I haven't looked back since and I feel I've finally found the place I am supposed to be! >

All in a day's work

The centre is divided into four main sections – kittens, admissions, homing and isolation wings. Firstly overnight observations are carried out and then the cats are fed and any medications given. It's then all about cleaning – the inside pens, back run areas, communal areas and of course litter trays! Cats Protection has thorough protocols in place for barrier nursing and infection control to minimise the risk of any potential cross-contamination.

The centre is open from 11am to 3pm every day and during these hours my time is mostly spent meeting potential adopters, helping them find the right cat for them, and making sure they are the right people for the cat in our care. This is also the time that excited new owners come to collect their new additions to the family, and it is a joy to chat through with them the next stages in helping their cat adjust to their new life.

In addition cats being relinquished into our care will be booked to arrive during these hours and this involves a health check by cat care staff and time settling them into our quieter admission wing. Cat socialisation is essential in helping reduce stress levels at the centre and we relish every available opportunity. We are supported in all this by a band of dedicated volunteers, be it regular volunteers, vet students on placement, students completing animal care courses, young people doing work experience or completing their Duke of Edinburgh Awards or those released from their day jobs to join us as part of their employer-supported volunteer scheme.

My day can also involve going into schools to give talks on cat welfare and all things Cats Protection, or we can be called upon to go out into the community to assist with injured strays, multi-cat households and feral colonies to name but a few. The day is rounded off with feeding, medicating and settling the cats for the night.

A memorable mog

Last year we had a desert cat called Gobi at the centre. He'd been rescued as a kitten in Kuwait by a member of the armed forces and brought to Scotland after a brief stay in France. He unfortunately had to be relinquished into our care by his owner who was devastated to be doing so. We quickly realised that Gobi has a dislike of other cats. He was mostly relaxed unless there was another cat in the mix, then he was always up for a fight. With this in mind we homed Gobi to a wonderful family located a fair distance from any other properties. Although things were great at home, the bold boy was travelling several miles to prove that he was the toughest cat around...and he was! After several months, he found himself sadly back in our care, again relinquished by distraught owners. It was heart-breaking to see him back here but there is good news! He has now got a new home and has settled in well. He is living on a small holding by the canal and is protecting the owner's ducks, chickens and pheasants. He even saw a mink off the premises! We know there is a place for every cat and this is why we keep doing what we do, determined to find them the right home.

Find your calling

To be a cat care assistant the first obvious requirement is a passion for cats, not just a passing interest but a real love and desire to help. Working at the centre can be a bit of an emotional rollercoaster as we see the best and worst of humanity on a frequent basis, so a good sense of humour is paramount! The welfare of our cats relies directly on communication and team work of the staff and volunteers. This means that ego and personal issues have to take a back seat in the best interest of our cats. This aspect has been really refreshing to me. Also the job is physical in part, so you need to be up for breaking a sweat!

One of the best things about my job is that it doesn't feel like a job at all! Every day is different and you never know what you'll be required to do or what new cat you are going to meet. Although the job can be stressful there is a real family spirit among the staff and our amazing volunteers, who I can't say enough good things about! The dedication shown by our volunteers is inspiring and many of us have become firm friends. The main highlight is of course the satisfaction of seeing a wee homeless, scared, untrusting cat finally find the place they are meant to be with the companions they're supposed to be with. Oh, and the kittens are pretty hilarious too! **C**

This article was written before the COVID-19 lockdown, however we wanted to still publish it as a tribute to those at the front line of cat care throughout the UK during this pandemic, their hard work never stops.



Taking it up a level

I started hillwalking in 2018 and decided to set myself a challenge for a year's time to summit the UK's highest peak Ben Nevis, while raising money for wee homeless Glasgow cats along the way. In 2019 we climbed the Ben by the CMD Arete, a stunning ridge walk connecting Carn Mor Dearg, the UK's ninth highest peak, to Ben Nevis itself. The year of hard work paid off as we reached the summit tired but nowhere near broken. I can honestly say it was one of the best experiences of my life so far and I hope it is the start of even bigger and better things.



It is cats like Gobi who particularly benefit from the expertise of the charity's cat care assistants, whose roles are supported by People's Postcode Lottery's players.

Watch Andy at work here
bit.ly/meetAndy-GlasgowAC