

Scratch and rescue

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A year after its formation, Scratch, formerly known as KTAJ, has become a strong online influence in rescuing stray cats, writes Syida Lizta Amirul Ihsan



Suzana (right) with Scratch spay/neuter coordinator Farrizza Sufian

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ARCHITECTURAL designer Suzana Sulaiman is busy caring for Cimoneng, a nine-year-old stray cat she rescued six months ago. It was so ill she had to take it to four vets before it started to get better.

“Initially she wasn’t recovering,” she says in a phone conversation. “It was tough seeing her so glum and sick.”

But Suzana, 30, isn’t just another pet owner. A year ago she and her friends started the Kucing Terbiar & Anjing Jalanan page on Facebook.

The girl from Johor, who now resides and works in Penang, says almost all pet owners she knows, rescued their pets from the streets.

“I started KTAJ to educate people on responsible pet ownership. Most importantly, they should neuter their pets to avoid overpopulation and prevent these animals from being abandoned.”

HELPING THE STRAYS

Now known as Scratch (Stray Cats Rescue And Treatment Community Help), the page has grown to be an online medium which connects rescuers.

“We also strive to educate the community on the benefits of spaying, neutering and on other aspects of cat ownership.”

Lately, Suzana says, Scratch has been inundated with requests to rescue strays. “We try to help by posting up emergency notices on Facebook, coordinating volunteers and donating cages, litter boxes and food as well as sponsoring neutering fees. Everything is done on a voluntary basis,” she says.

Scratch currently has more than 19,000 followers on Facebook and 66,965 blog visitors. It has 30 core members, known as Scratchers, in Penang, Perak, Johor, Kuala Lumpur and Selangor who organise activities, including adoption.

TEACHING TOOLS

Suzana says education is the key when it comes to compassion and treatment of animals. Adults should be role models and explain to children that animals, too, have feelings, “including pain, fear and the need to be loved ... just like humans.”

“It is also their role to remind children that God hates cruelty, including to animals.

“I hope all pet owners are aware of their responsibilities. Owning a pet is not only about feeding and playing with it but it also includes deworming, vaccinating, spaying/neutering and also hygiene care and knowledge of animal behaviour and diseases.”

She hopes to see a future where no cat is abandoned or dumped because the owner has “too many”.

THE ISSUE OF NEUTERING

The main reasons why people do not spay or neuter their pets, she says, are the fee and time involved. “Some feel it is unnecessary to neuter their pets but when the number of cats multiplies, they dump the unwanted kittens on the streets. Owners need to be more responsible. Learn to appreciate life,” she advises.

Scratch also has an online adoption house and provides potential pet owners with subsidies for neutering.

But there are different reasons why some don't want to adopt. Suzana explains: “Most say they are looking for a purebred animal. Unfortunately, this leads to more ‘backyard breeders’.

“The public should be aware of the benefits of neutering and the consequences of backyard breeding. In the end, all we want to see is reduction in pet dumping and a rise in adoption so these animals have good homes.”