A companion for LIFE

Posted on
Three adorable companions

We stood still as wary eyes, shining bright with curiosity watched us through the gaps of the enclosure, their tales swishing in measured degrees. All was calm and quiet that is until the door opened. Little balls of fur swarmed us, running as fast as their little paws could carry 'meowing' excitedly. And so our little adventure at the Cat Protection Trust in Gampaha began…

Words Krishani Peiris | **Photographs** Hansani Bandara

Perched on top of a step, with one cat on her lap and another rubbing against her arm, Indira Sahadevan smiled adoringly as more cats vied for her attention at times lightly snipping at her elbows. "When I came to Sri Lanka, I was appalled by the dismal living conditions of feral and stray cats in Colombo. And this inspired me to establish the Cat Protection Trust, which is a transit home," she explained as she continued to scratch behind the ears of a cat as its eyes drifted shut in content.

Having worked as an animal rescue volunteer in the United Kingdom for several years, Indira utilised her experience to work with a few animal welfare organisations

in Colombo, striving to find loving homes and to provide a transit shelter for abandoned cats and dogs. She attempted to find a solution to the increasing feral cat population, which had worsened due to neglect and ignorance. “Many people do not want to take cats as pets and while the government has an island-wide sterilisation and vaccination programme for dogs, there are no such measures taken for cats. Therefore, I started using my own funds to conduct sterilisation programmes and re-home cats over the past few years.” The Cat Protection Trust, established in 2011, is an extension of this initiative as she realised the need for a more organised, wide-reaching programme to aid animals.

Located in a one acre plot of land, a lone building and a large yard, divided into spacious enclosures house cats and dogs separately. Entering through the main door of the compound, wagging tales and small yips greeted us. Jumping up to reach our hands or pawing and licking eagerly, the puppies looked at us with their little doggy hearts filled with love. The transit home has a large number of cats, adult dogs and puppies where the numbers fluctuate, either increasing or decreasing as people opt to adopt. Everywhere we went we were greeted by a friendly wag and a bark by the dogs while the cats, though cautious at first quickly warmed up making us doubt the ‘unlovable’ perception that many associate with them.

Indira continues her work for animals diligently, going from villageto village conducting sterilisation programmes, especially for cats. A team of veterinary surgeons from Kandy help her in this endeavour while another organisation provide some aid to vaccinate, sterilise and re-home, mainly dogs. “What saddens me is that people have a wrong perception of what I am doing here. They believe that this place is a shelter, however this is a transit home where we encourage people to adopt pets and provide them a home.

Currently we have too many animals and it is not possible to take in anymore as it is not hygienic for many animals to live together in one place as well,” she revealed.

Indira further expresses that the solution for this rising population of cats and dogs is sterilisation and people should be educated regarding the fact. “Though I conduct several sterilisation programmes a year, it is becoming increasingly difficult due to inadequate funding. Therefore, if there are willing individuals who will like to help out we welcome their assistance.”

The enclosure is home to several disabled dogs and cats as well where stories of

dogs being in accidents and shot at make way for heart-wrenching tales. However through the sad stories of abandonment, hope still remains as heart warming tales of kind strangers adopting cats and dogs gives courage to Indira. “Once a former French Prime Minister’s wife visited the compound and a cat walked up to her and gave a kiss. She fell in love with the cat and took her all the way to her home in France,” she reminisces fondly.

There are two workers who help Indira with the day to day running of the compound and she provides two meals per day, morning and evening besides the constant pampering of pet food that the cats and dogs receive. However, she insists that it is difficult to maintain such a large number of animals on her own and there are not that many people willing to assist.

“I require additional resources to maintain and look after these adorable animals. They need medicine, vaccination and food and it is hard for me to manage alone. But more than that as this is just a transit home what these animals need are loving homes. People should consider adopting one of these lovable cats and dogs as they make great companions.”.

She explains that people who live in apartments that doesn’t allow pets can even sponsor or foster a pet and visit them at the transit home on appointment. All animals are well taken care of, though Indira feels that it is not enough as their starved hearts need much love and attention that cannot be given by one person alone. It is apparent by the way that cats cling on to her that they wait for her to come by and lavish some care with a good rub and a pat.

All cats and dogs at the transit home are waiting patiently, ears cocked and eyes eagerly catching even the slightest movement, for someone to take them to their ‘forever homes’. Are you willing to let these bundles of joy walk into your lives?

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