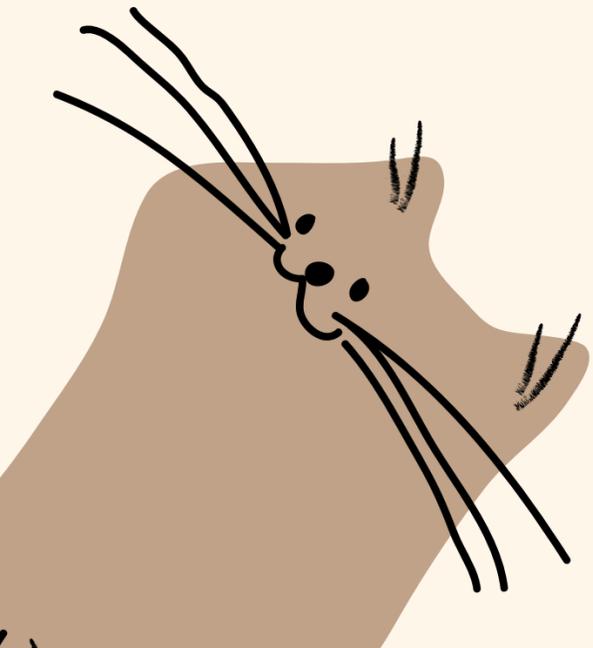


**CAT PERSON
RESEARCH
PROJECT**



Exploring the Cat-Human Bond Through the
Special Impact of Therapy Cats





Taylor Chastain Griffin, PhD

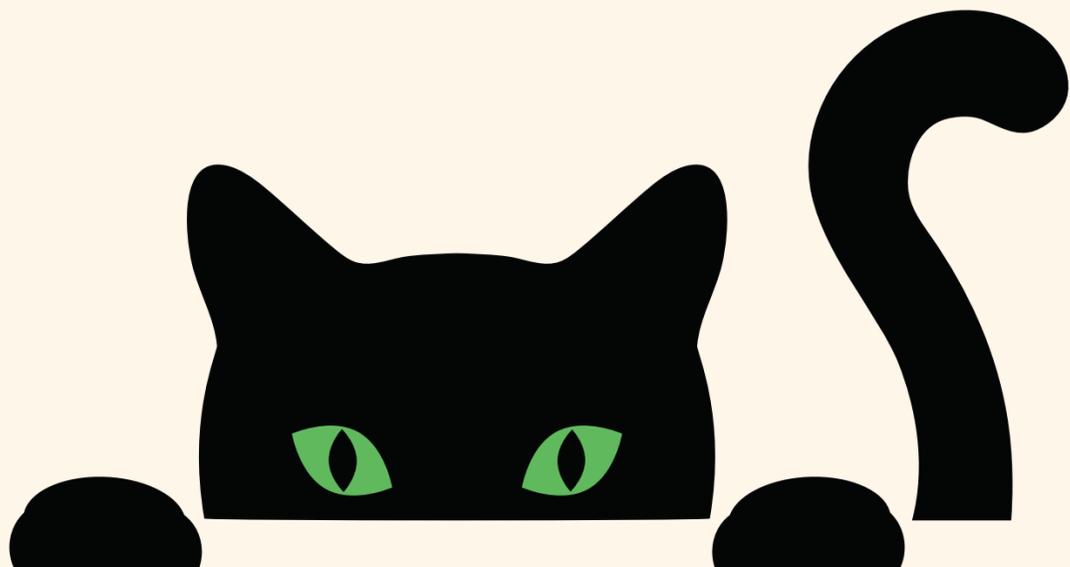
National Director, AAI Advancement,
Pet Partners

Executive Director, The Association of
Animal-Assisted Intervention
Professionals (AAAIP)

- Background in dog training and mental health counseling, and research psychology
- Therapy animal handler and evaluator
- Dog person

How the project came to be...

- Began conversation with Cat Person at the end of 2022.
- Cat Person provided a sponsorship to fund the research project.
- Partnered with Dr. Lori Kogan at Colorado State University
- Study took place Q1 of 2023.
- Launched findings mid October.

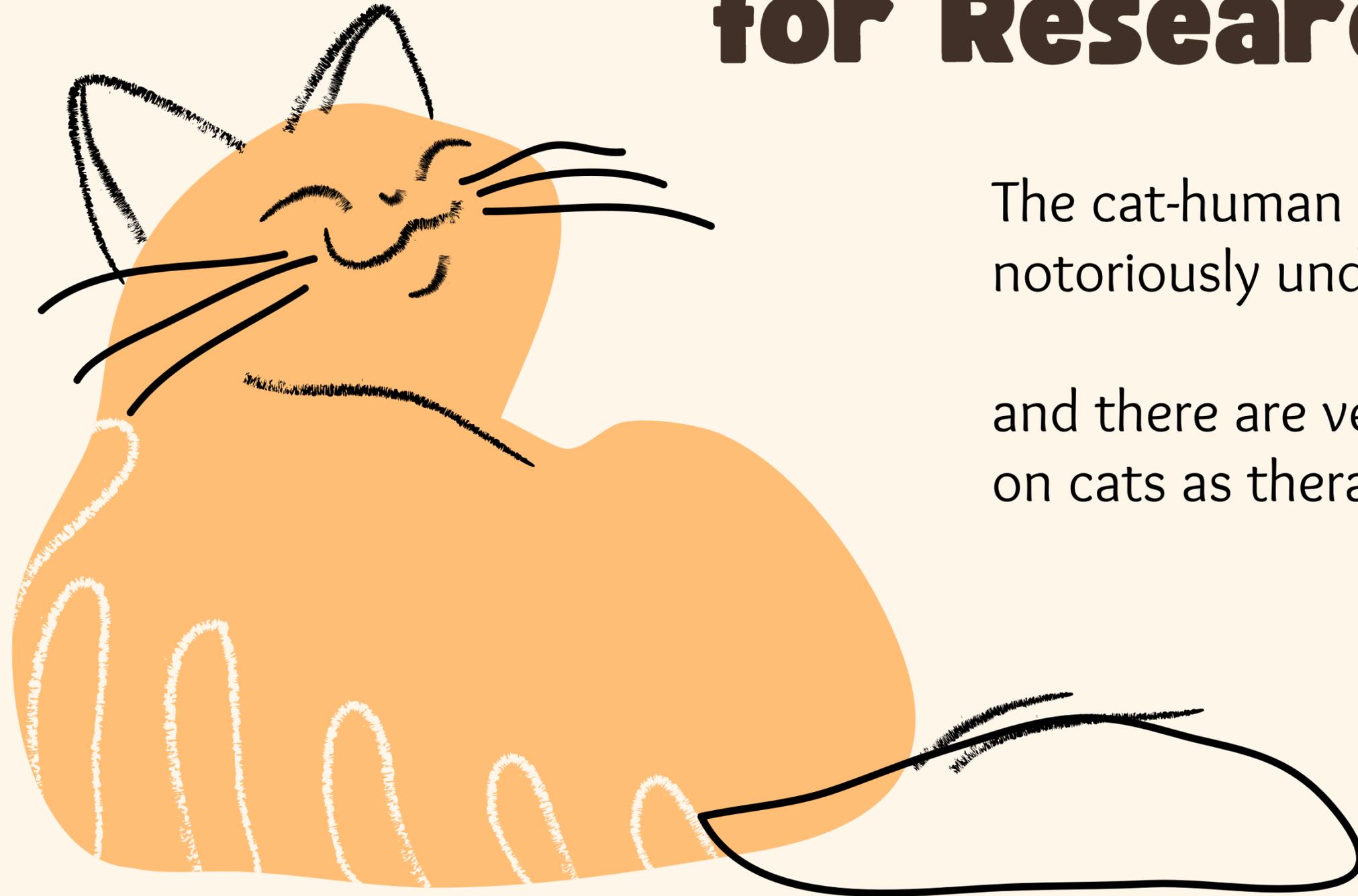


Cat Person



- Launched in 2020
- Bringing transparency and innovation to a long underserved and confusing category: cat care
- Simple, high-quality cat care reimaged for cats and their persons to make real life with cats easier
- Set aside 1% of our sales to studying the connection between cats and their people

Answering the Call for Research



The cat-human relationship is notoriously under-studied,

and there are very limited studies on cats as therapy animals.



Study Details

Mixed methods study including existing scales in the field (such as the Cat Owner Relationship Scale)

- 1** Surveys sent to therapy cat handlers
- 2** Surveys sent to facility contacts
- 3** 1:1 Interviews with handlers and facilities

These efforts yielded considerable data

63 cat owner/handler survey responses + **29** cat owner/handler interviews

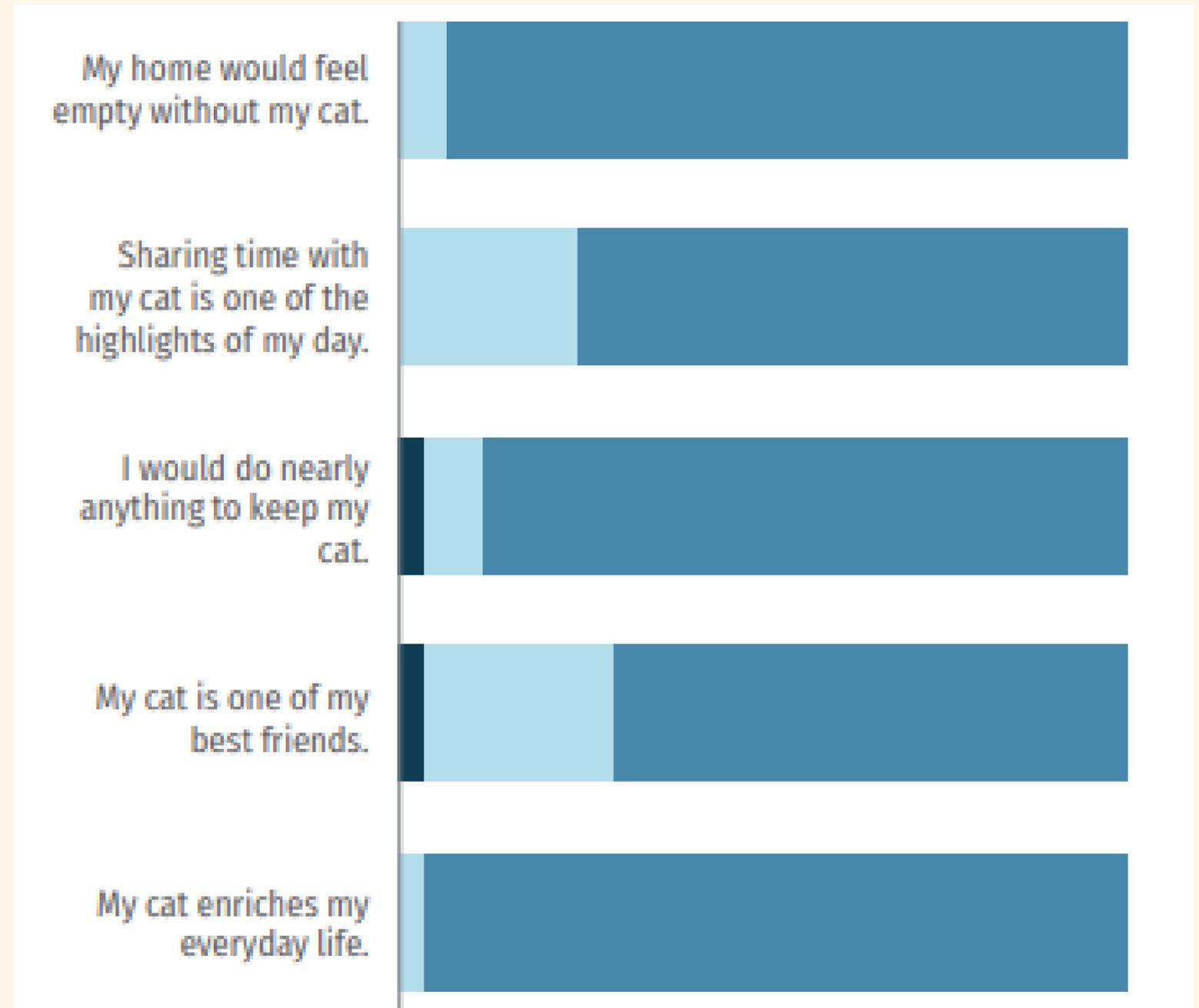
13 facility contact survey responses + **07** facility contact interviews

Given the limited number of therapy cat teams that exist (estimated to be around 200 in the U.S.), this project successfully captured the perspectives of a representative portion of this niche population.

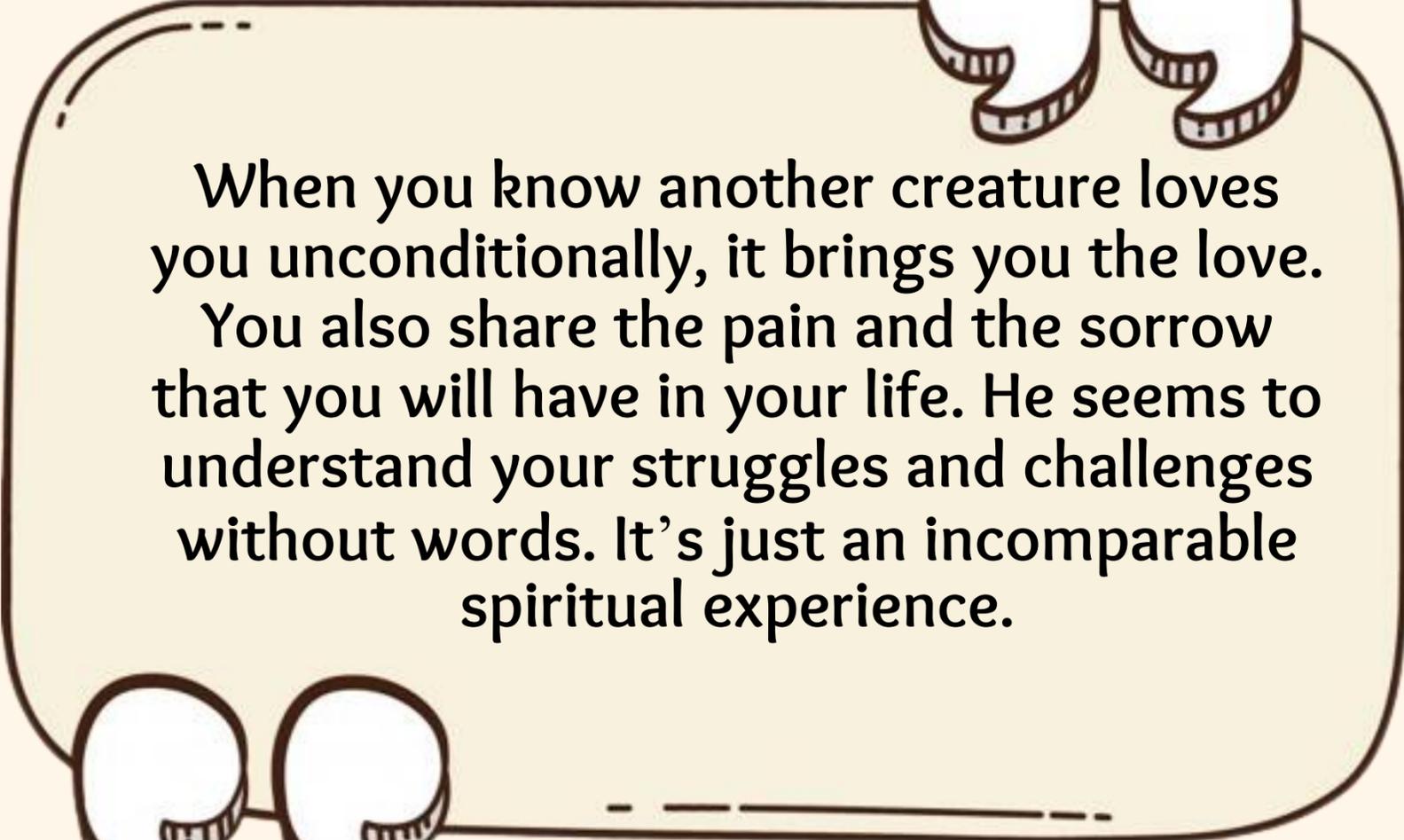


Cat-Owner Relationship Questions

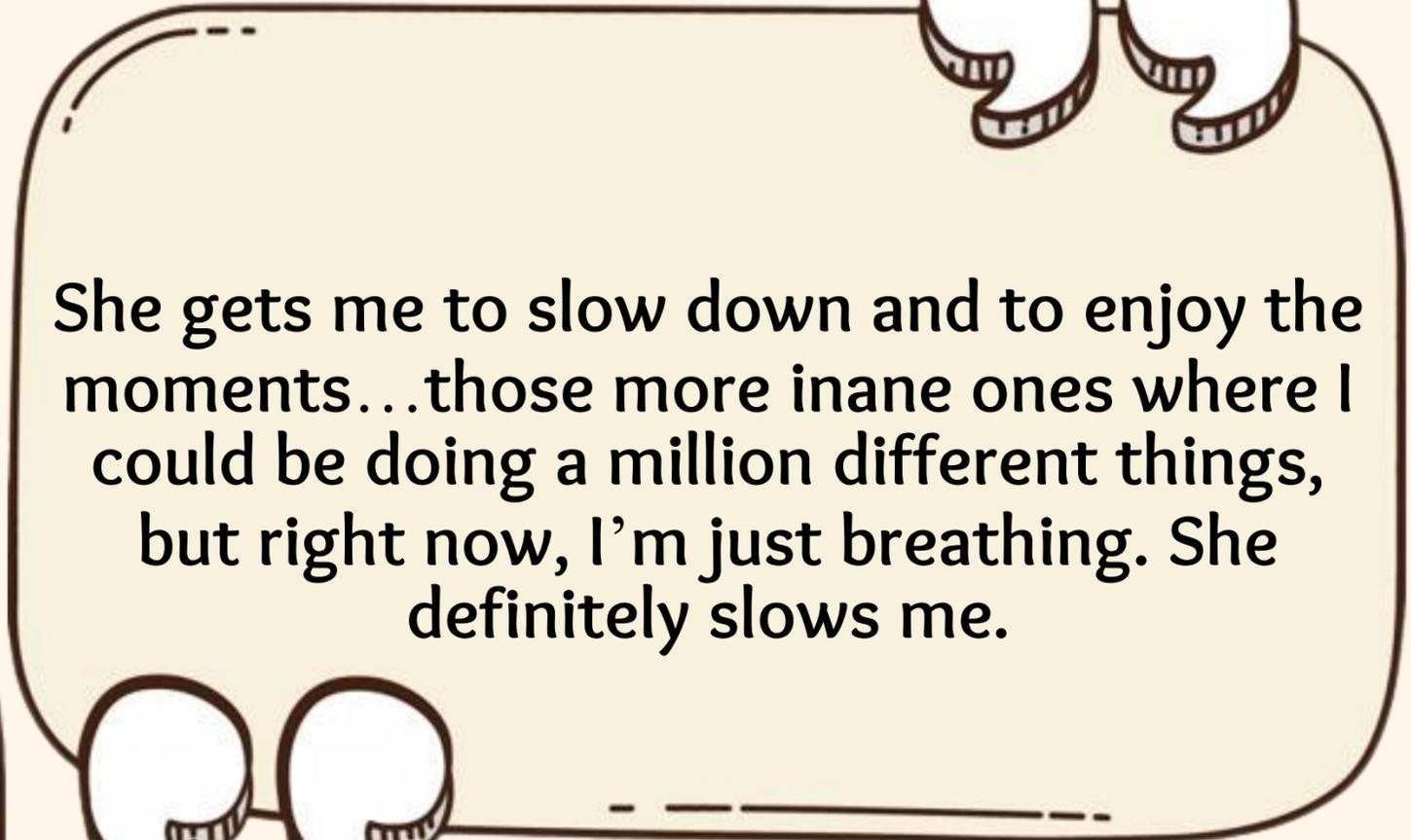
- Cats provide connection, playfulness, and social support.
- 100% of participants reported that they never feel that having a cat is more work than its worth.
- Cat ownership isn't a chore!



Strongly agree Agree
Neither agree nor disagree Disagree



When you know another creature loves you unconditionally, it brings you the love. You also share the pain and the sorrow that you will have in your life. He seems to understand your struggles and challenges without words. It's just an incomparable spiritual experience.

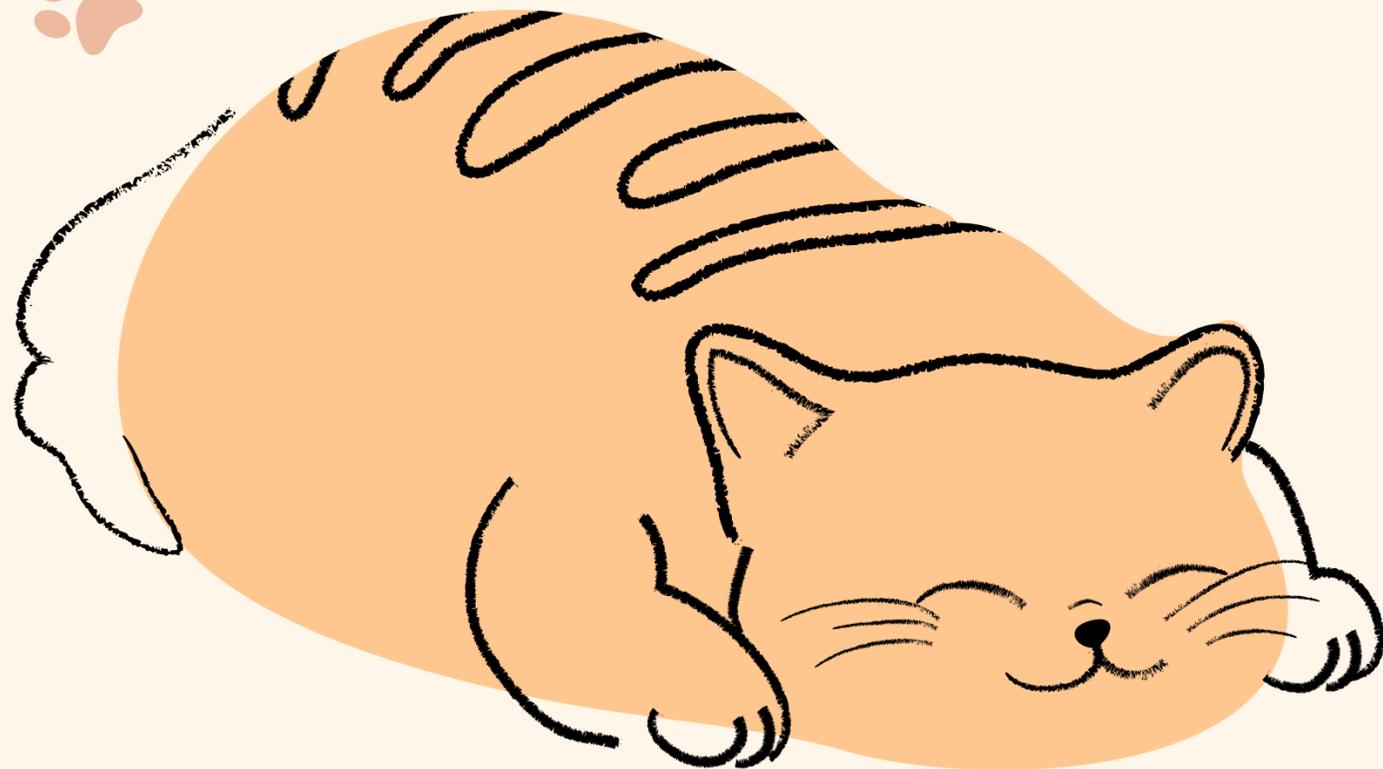


She gets me to slow down and to enjoy the moments...those more inane ones where I could be doing a million different things, but right now, I'm just breathing. She definitely slows me.

The Bond is Especially Meaningful During Life's Challenging Chapters



- a reason to get out of bed
 - inspiration to stick to a routine
- safe place for affection
 - highly protective during COVID



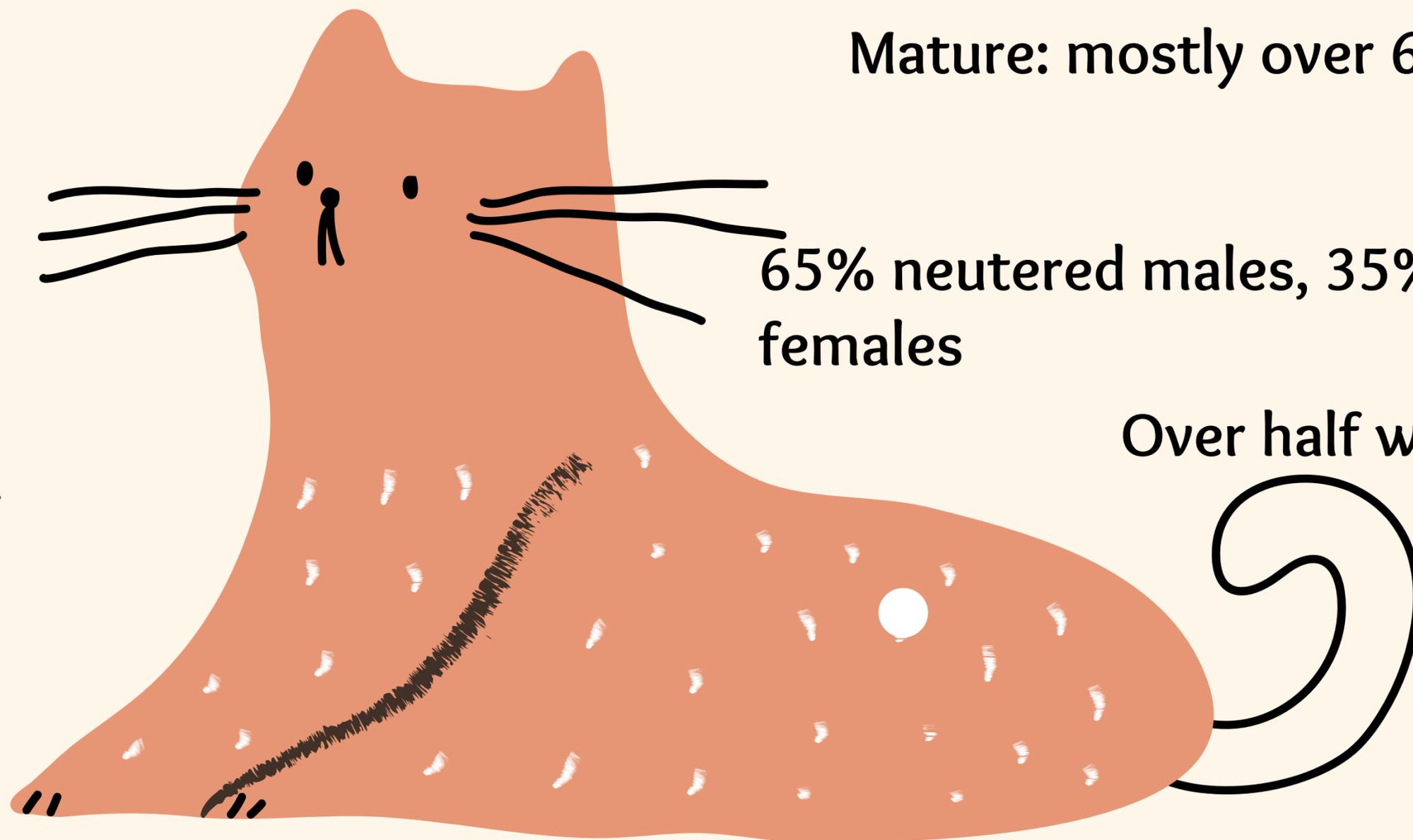
What about the therapy cats?



Established relationships with handlers (~5 years)



Wide variety of breeds



Mature: mostly over 6 years old

65% neutered males, 35% spayed females

Over half were rescued!



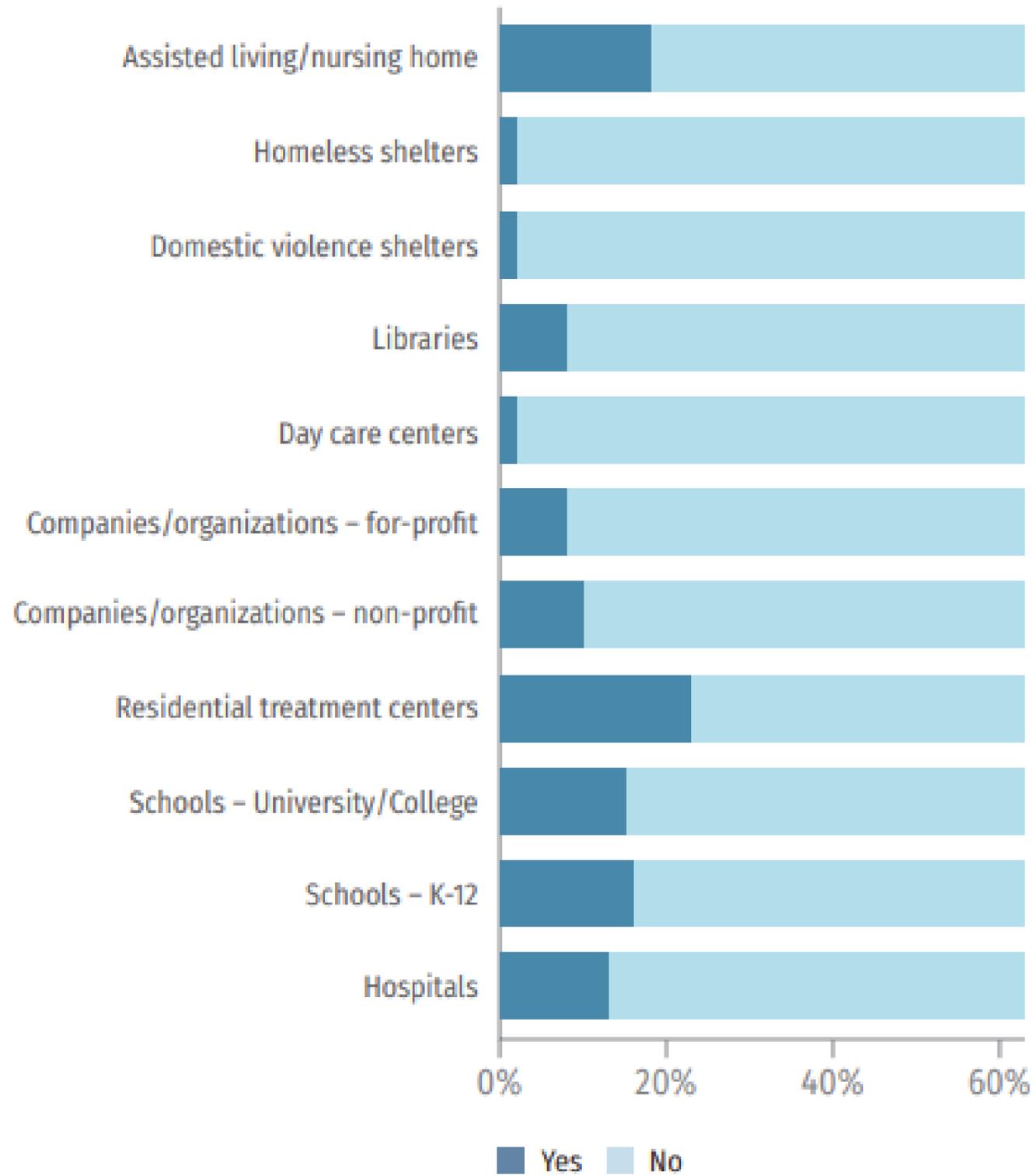
What we Love about Cats:



Cat people love them for who they are, not who they want them to be, if that makes sense. A lot of people are dog people, and I'm not putting anybody down. Everybody has preferences. I love everything. But dogs are more into obedience and like, "I want you. I'll pay attention to you," and cats are just like, "This is me. Love it or leave me."

“

Where the Teams Visit



These teams are changing lives.

Variable:	Reported by Handler:	Reported by Facility:
↓ depression	73%	81%
↓ loneliness	83%	75%
↓ isolation	75%	69%
↓ stress	72%	81%
↓ anxiety	73%	81%

““
Cats provide an opportunity for patients to practice emotional regulation. They're not like dogs where they just come right up to you and they're really happy. You really have to calm yourself and be calm and quiet, and then the cat comes up to you. It's more rewarding for them.
””

““
This lady was in memory care and does not remember who she is, where she is, or anybody around her. But if I ask her, “Do you want to see Reba today?” she just looks at me and says, “Oh, the cat.” She remembers the cat. And I think that's part of the power that animals have. It's this ability to awaken memories and to awaken feelings that people may have forgotten or may have been unable to access.
””

““
Some people will say it's the first time their child has smiled while in the hospital.
””

““
The volunteer coordinator says that our visits are like bringing the outside world
to this man who's not really able to go out and be in the world anymore.
””

provide
education
about pet
ownership

comfort to
pet owners
who are away
from their
pets

help
overcome
fear of cats

**100% of participants say
clients are surprised to
see a therapy cat.**

makes AAI
accessible to
non-dog
lovers

inspires
engagement
from
“shutdown”
clients





Inspiring special connections for cat lovers...



Variable:	Reported by Handler:	Reported by Facility:
increased interest in cats	87%	63%
increased positive feelings about cats	80%	69%
increased sharing stories about animals	85%	81%
increased sharing stories about own cat	92%	81%

“That purring... those vibrations...just the joy that having an animal like that crawl into your lap and just be there with you is just so healing.”

...having that cat trust you enough to snuggle in and purr...there is just nothing more comforting than that.



Obtaining Facility Contact Perspectives

100%

of the facility contacts reported
a positive view of the therapy
cat programming

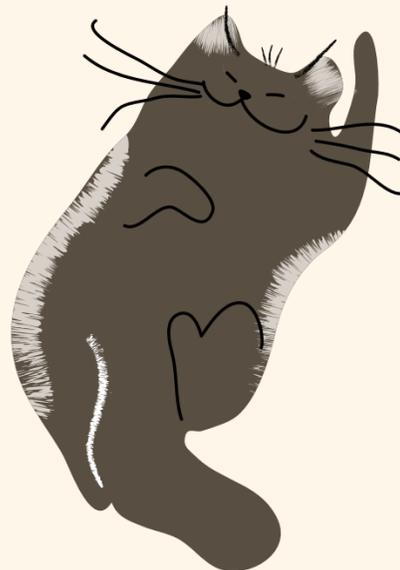
At first, we were hesitant; however, Harry the cat has exceeded all expectations. Most of our patients love the cat.

Our patients and staff love the cats. It provides an opportunity to experience therapy animals for patients who are afraid of dogs.

Volunteering Together Benefits the Handler-Cat Bond

82% of the participants reported AAI positively impacting their relationship with their cat

“Going on visits is always “our” time. She knows when she gets the harness on she is going on visits and gets extra cuddly as we prepare to leave. I feel like the visits strengthen our bond because she gets to love on others and still come home with me for cuddles after.”



Handlers are careful to monitor their cat's stress level during visits. If their cat appears stressed, they rely on a variety of options to reduce stress when needed.



Breaks

67%

Handlers who reported taking a break during a visit as prompted by their cat



**Cueing
Clients**

56%

Handlers who reported asking the client to change the way they were interacting with the cat



**Providing
Comfort**

73%

Handlers who reported providing comfort to their cat to reassure them during AAI



**Ending
a Visit**

68%

Handlers who reported ending a visit early based on their cat's needs



You Don't Have to be Born a Cat Person!

Some participants reported having cats as far back as they could remember...

Others became 'cat people' later in life.

Breaking the Stereotypes Related to Cats



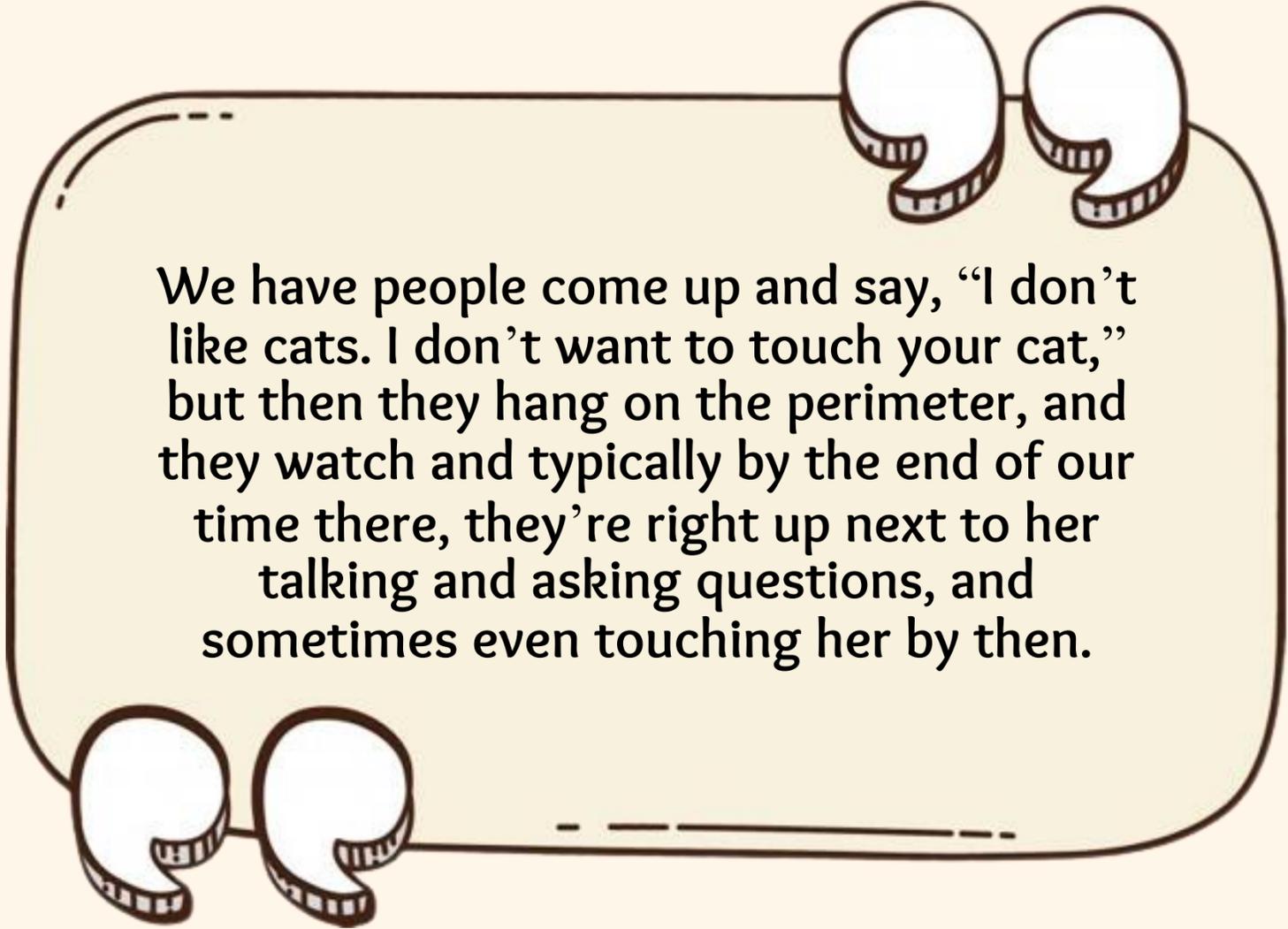
Common Stereotypes

- ⊗ Aloof
- ⊗ Standoffish
- ⊗ Unaffectionate
- ⊗ All alike
- ⊗ Unable to be trained

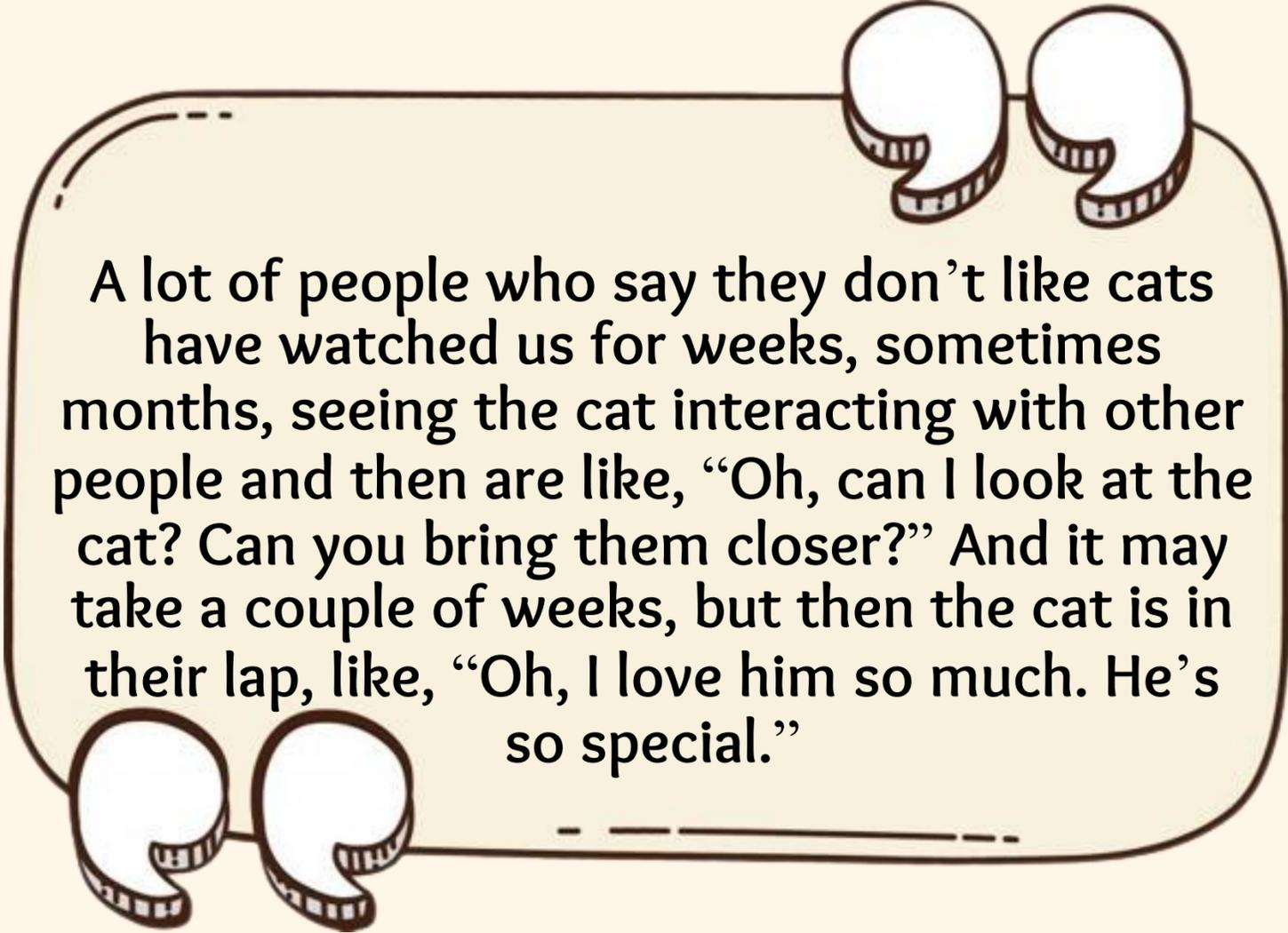
Truths about Cats

- ✓ Intuitive
- ✓ Loving
- ✓ Eager to learn
- ✓ Personable
- ✓ Each cat has a unique personality





We have people come up and say, “I don’t like cats. I don’t want to touch your cat,” but then they hang on the perimeter, and they watch and typically by the end of our time there, they’re right up next to her talking and asking questions, and sometimes even touching her by then.



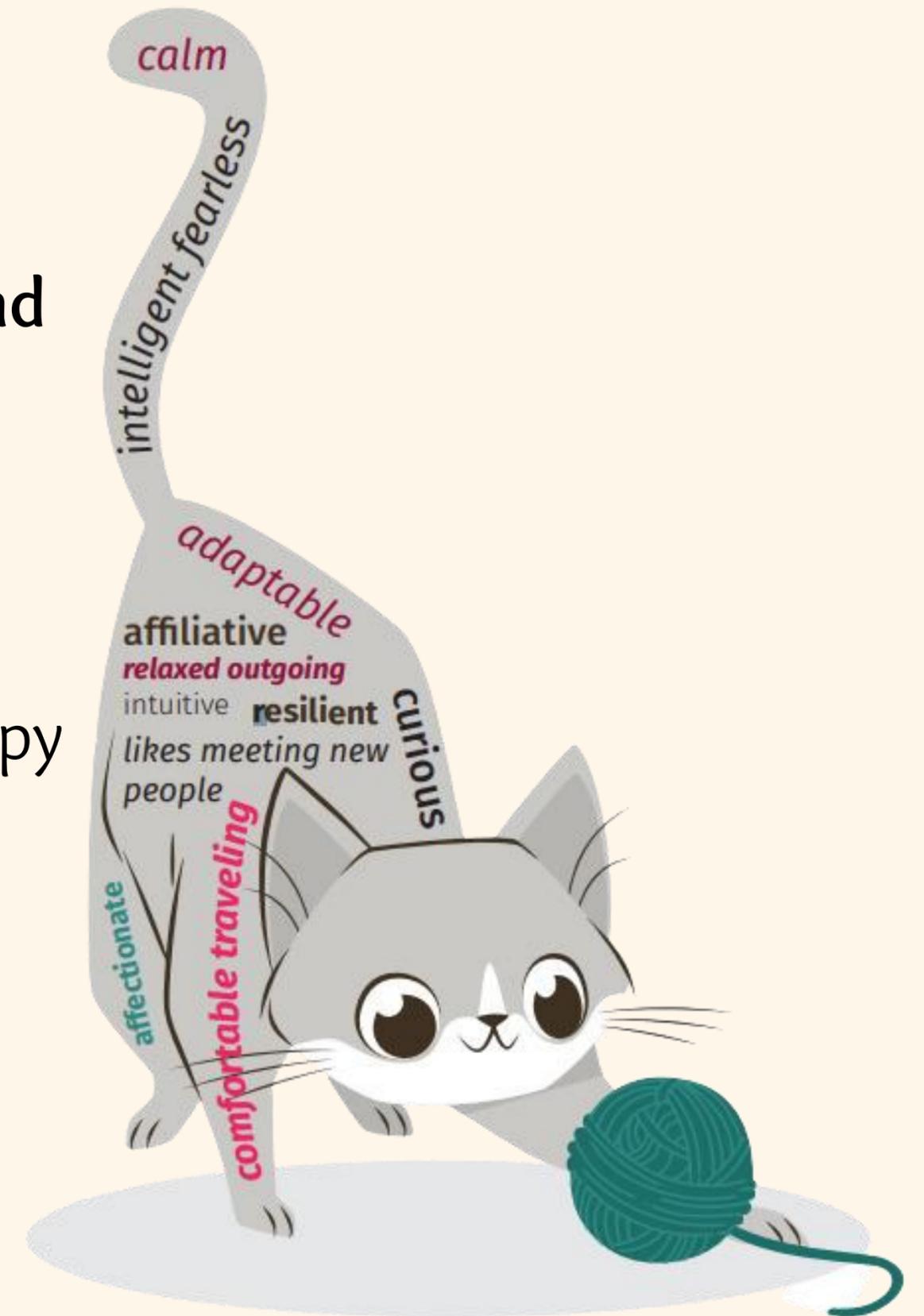
A lot of people who say they don’t like cats have watched us for weeks, sometimes months, seeing the cat interacting with other people and then are like, “Oh, can I look at the cat? Can you bring them closer?” And it may take a couple of weeks, but then the cat is in their lap, like, “Oh, I love him so much. He’s so special.”

Challenging what it means to be a cat person...

Call to Action

Generating awareness about the cat-human bond and the ability for cats to be therapy animals.

- 100% of participants noted a need for more therapy cats
 - Cat people need cat people.
 - Cats are the perfect size.
 - Cats have a calming energy.



Suggestions for Preparing Cats for AAI

Socialize your cat and watch their responses

Acclimate the cat to travel

Expose your cat to the necessary equipment

Connect with trusted AAI groups



Project Outcomes

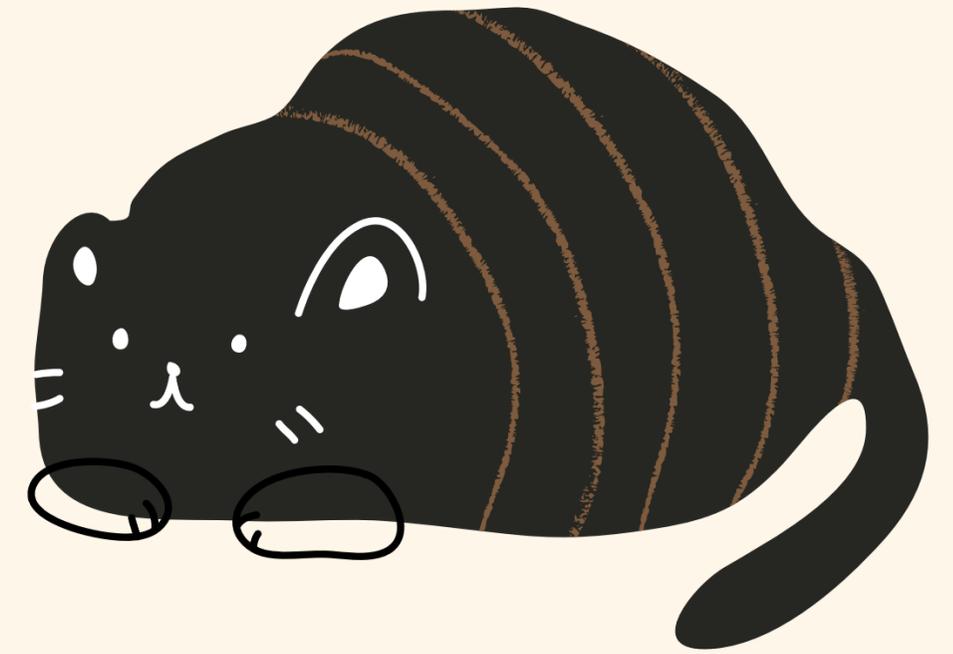
Podcasts such as Pet Talk Radio

Authority Magazine & BuzzFeed

Local news stories featuring handler participants

American Psychological Association HAI Presentation

Pet Boarding & Care Magazine





Informing 2024 Plans

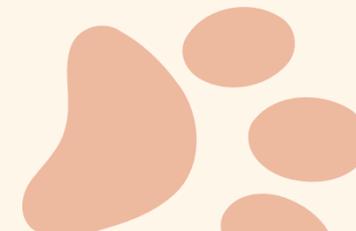


-Targeted recruitment for more therapy cat teams.

-Advocacy for the unique power of therapy cats.

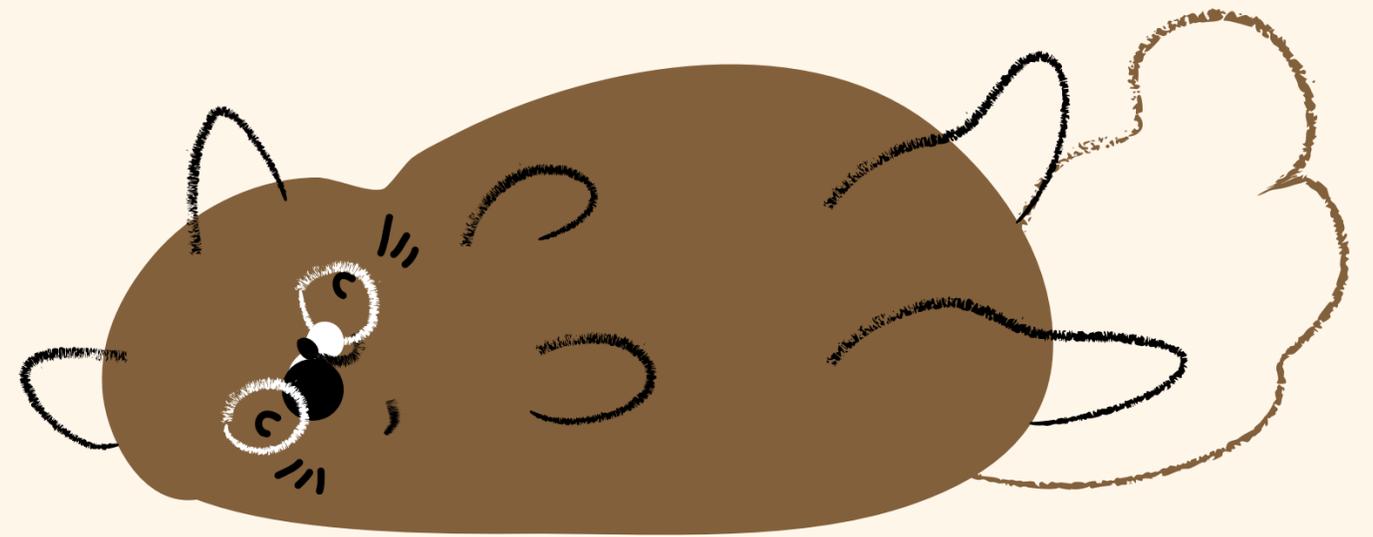
-Calls for more research on human-cat interaction.

-Resources to mitigate roadblocks therapy cat teams might encounter.



Topics in need of further exploration:

- how to best evaluate a therapy cat
- best practices for therapy cat visits (duration, setting, etc.)
- unique impact of cats and other therapy animal species



THANK YOU!

Questions?

Discussion?

Testimonies?

**Download the full
Whitepaper at:
petpartners.org/catperson**

