

Celebrating 60 years of caring for cats

This year our cat-loving community has reached a marvellous milestone; 60 years since Cat Protection began the important mission of finding loving and responsible homes for cats. We're taking this opportunity to look back on all that has changed in that time, to tell the story of the remarkable people who have cared for cats, and the wonderful wins for felines that we've achieved. We will be holding events throughout the year to celebrate with you, our wonderful supporters, so do check your email, letter box and future editions of *Cat Affairs* for details.

Cat Protection began in 1958, as a small group of just 10 volunteers dedicated to reducing the number of stray cats. They worked tirelessly to desex street cats and find them loving and responsible homes. For many years, those kind-hearted people had no permanent premises to meet or to house the cats they helped in the Society's name. All they had was a post office box, some stationery and the home phone of our President and founder, Mrs Mary Kay Cooper. Meetings to educate members on cat care were held wherever space could be found. In 1960 the Cat Protection Society became a charity. Our Society was named after an English charity, Cats Protection, who were considered a beacon in the field of feline welfare. This is why we share a name (but no affiliation) with cat protection societies in so many places; our shared esteem for fellow advocates for felines.

The Society faced many challenges in those early years. Our lack of premises and paid staff did not prevent us from helping cats and with the dream of a safe home for every cat, early members built the foundations of the strong and spirited organisation we are today. The Society was still without a fixed address, and members resolved to find a permanent premises when funds allowed. With the goal set, the Auxiliary redoubled their efforts to raise the necessary funds; cake and bric-a-brac stalls were held, members collected bottles so they could claim the small rebate, and garden parties were thrown.

Those transient years came to a close in 1979 when bequest income allowed us to purchase the property that continues to be our home today, 103 Enmore Road. In the beginning it housed our Op Shop and administrative operations but no cats. There was much excitement from members and an open day was planned so they could see the property. Members were reminded: *"If coming by car slip in a folding chair or box as, apart from the stairs, we will have nothing for you to sit on."* Over the years the support of our community has allowed us to renovate the building to improve the quality of care we can provide for our cats. Sybil Cozens, who ran the Op Shop for many years, reflected on this time in the Winter 1989 edition of *Cat Affairs*: *"My husband Gordon and I spent every*



weekend with Ron [Carberry, the President of the Society] to get the premises into shape. We pulled up old lino and removed thousands of nails from the floor, took up the floor boards and tons of blue metal from beneath the shop area. We painted, scrubbed, cleaned. In fact, you name it, we did it! The three of us and other volunteers quite enjoyed it."



In 1980 we established our welfare office. We had one cat ambulance (a retrofitted van used to ferry our felines to the vet) and that was staffed by one full-time employee. Several members volunteered their welfare and administrative skills to ensure we could care for cats every day of the week, including the indomitable Nance Iredale OAM who contributed so much to Cat Protection. Over the next decade we grew slowly but steadily, until by the end of the 80s we had cat ambulances and welfare officers on the road helping cats, plus an administration officer at Enmore Road. A number of regular dedicated volunteers, who were integral to our organisation, continued to assist with the office and welfare work. We did not have the resources to rehome cats from Enmore Road in those days, but a commercial cattery owned by a stalwart supporter, as well as several of the vet clinics we worked with, hosted and looked after our cats for adoption.

Cat Protection has witnessed many changes in feline welfare since our inception. From 1991 we were involved in pioneering feline early-age desexing in Australia. One of our vet partners, Dr Paul Waters of Concord Animal Hospital, became interested in the idea and keenly followed the research coming out of the United States on the subject. When satisfied the procedure was safe he approached us for support and conducted the procedure on a small number of kittens over a year. In 1992 we became the first shelter in Australia to commit to never again rehome undesexed cats or kittens. In 1993, Nance Iredale – who was the Welfare Director of Cat Protection for much of the 80s, reflected that *“it was probably around this time that the Executive began to feel that the battle might be winnable. That we may be able to improve quality of life as well as quantity of life.”*



Sandy Moss & Nance Iredale OAM

Cat Protection could not have made it this far without the input from and collaboration with those at the leading-edge of veterinary care. Concord Animal Hospital made a huge contribution to Cat Protection over the years, first under Dr Paul Waters, then under Dr Alice Noe-Nordberg and Sandy Moss. Sandy Moss was a welfare officer with Cat Protection for 23 years before moving to Concord Animal Hospital; she was the second welfare officer hired by Cat Protection and through her years of service left an indelible mark on our work. So many precious feline lives were saved or improved as a result of the strong cooperative relationship between Cat Protection and Concord Animal Hospital.

Today we continue to honour the legacy of our early members. Over the years, we have come to rely on staff as well as volunteers — a reality of changing demographics the demands of an accountable, complex and professional organisation. The prohibitive costs of congestion, petrol prices, tolls and insurance have drastically reduced our capacity for direct pick-up welfare services so these are now fewer but replaced with very efficient referral services, thanks to a greatly expanded network of vet clinics working with us. In addition to rehoming cats and kittens, we run targeted, high-impact health, education and welfare programs making desexing, vaccinations and microchipping available to low-income cat owners.

We have also maximised the benefits of technology including information and education services through our websites, www.catprotection.org.au and www.catcare.org.au. Each year we do all this on a budget that is less than the annual marketing budget of some of the larger animal welfare charities. We are fortunate to work with some of the best feline medicine specialists in Australia. We have come a long way from those humble early years, but we remain connected to our rich history as we move forward.

Hundreds of people have contributed significantly to Cat Protection over the years, far too many to name each one. We would not be who we are in spirit or in deed without our committed members, the enthusiasm and talent of our staff and the generosity and goodwill of our volunteers; thank you for your support.



Nance Iredale OAM

We acknowledge all those who served on past boards, auxiliaries and committees; they gave their time and expertise freely. We've come so far as an organisation thanks to the compassion and generosity of countless men and women who have gone before us. All the while we have retained a unique spirit marked by the joy with which we help cats. We are a charity and every gift is precious because it is given with care and love. Could those early members who started out by looking around at the many street cats in their neighbourhood and caring for them one at a time have imagined all that has been built from their legacy? They had such a battle in front of them. But they looked forward, with determination and optimism, to a future where feline overpopulation and the suffering it causes would be a thing of the past. As do we.



Nita Harvey

We've achieved a lot together and are on the precipice of achieving much more. We're working hard to ensure Cat Protection is around for many decades into the future; to care for cats, and to be their voice in NSW.