

BELFAIR HERALD

Thursday, Sept. 30, 2021

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Cheerful Bulldogs

North Mason High School cheerleaders, left to right, Nevaeh Baker, Alyssa DiMatteo and Abigail Green perform during halftime of a football game Sunday at Phil Pugh Stadium in Belfair. *Herald photo by Justin Johnson*

Cat program brings comfort to inmates, staff

By Matt Baide
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Many cats in this world need forever homes and some cats need help becoming home-ready before finding a place that is the perfect fit.

Before a cat reaches a permanent home, they may need to be socialized and make sure they are healthy before adoption. The Pawsitive Prison Project & Cat Adoption Program at Mission Creek Correctional Center for Women does just that.

The program works with Mason County and Kitsap County Humane Societies to help foster cats — the HSMC relies 100% on foster homes

before adoption since they do not have a shelter. Darron Everitt is the unit supervisor who oversees the program. He said the program began around 2014 with some former Department of Corrections employees and Mission Creek Superintendent Dennis Tabb. The program started in partnership with the Kitsap County Humane Society.

MCCCW has a tier where the cats get to live with inmates known as cat handlers, who care for them to help socialize and nurture the cats to good health before they are adopted by families. The handlers are volunteers and must meet certain requirements before being accepted into the program

and trained online. The cats are sent over from the humane society and once the cat handlers get a cat, they are paid.

The cats live in the room with the cat handlers. The cats are housed in seven rooms.

"It's all about socialization so they can be adopted," Everitt told the *Herald*. "If you take a cat to a cat show and it's not socialized, it won't get adopted because it will just be hiding in a corner instead of being friendly and wanting to be petted. There are steps to accomplish this, first they get used to their room and get curious about the hall. Then we can open the hall to the cats, it's a bigger world, and then we

let other people in the cat hall socialize with them, so they get used to more people.

"Once they get really curious and want to step out, we put them on a leash and we'll pull them out to the general population for the whole unit. The cat handler determines when the cats are ready to be petted. If the cat is not ready to be petted, then everyone knows to stay away. But if the cat is ready to be petted, then other people in the unit can pet the cat."

The program is popular among inmates — seven people are waiting to be in the program. Inmate Christine

see **CATS**, page A-46

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Mary and Sam head east to Yakima for a weekend fair

This week Mary has an enjoyable week. Mary and Sam went to Yakima to attend the fair. Mary and Effie had their lunch out on Theler's bulkhead. The boathouse was finished and the boat put inside, just in time for the rains I suspect. They cut down a huge cherry tree in their yard. Mary has some clothes altered and gets a permanent. I would say Mary had a good life at this point of her life.



CLYDENE HOSTETLER
MARY'S MEMOIRS

Thursday, Sept. 26, 1946

Today was a wonderful sunny day and very warm out. Betty and I drove to Tahuya after breakfast and saw Mrs. Huson and Mr. Knolton. Effie was in Shelton on jury duty. Home and ate lunch out on the bulkhead. It was lovely out there. We surely enjoyed it. Then I raked all the grass off the lawn. After dinner I took Betty to the ferry. Went to Alma Nelson's and visited for about an hour and then home. Very dark

out but not cold. Had a letter from the Hinseys in South Dakota.

Friday, Sept. 27, 1946

Today was not so warm but still lovely out. Very smoky. Bud Bickle helped finish the boathouse and put the boat inside. Then cut down big wild cherry tree by the garden that was dying. Mowed the lawn. Put up poles for wisteria by the chicken house. I cut a lot of flowers and have all the vases full. Wrote to Mrs. Hinsey

that we could not make South Dakota this year.

Saturday, Sept. 28, 1946

Arose early. We left Belfair at 10:15. Arrived in Yakima at 3 p.m. Went to the fair and ate a big hot dog. Saw nothing as good as Puyallup. Road over the mountain was very lovely. Arrived to Goldendale at 7:10 and got a room at the hotel. A bright moon. Tried to rain a couple of times but very warm out.

Sunday, Sept. 29, 1946

Arose late. It surely was a noisy place. So many trucks went through. We ate breakfast at 10:30 along the way. It was a lovely morning and the sun was very warm. Saw the fish ladders at Bonnevillie. It is a sight to see. Then on toward home. Good weather all the way. So many fall flowers are in bloom now. We ate in Olympia at the Oyster Bar. Very good. Home and put things away. Lovey called

up and asked me to dinner Saturday eve. Sam went to Masonic meeting. I went to Walker's to try on clothes to be lengthened.

Monday, Sept. 30, 1946

Arose early. Had a permanent at Wycoff's and stopped at Walker's. Got some clothes she lengthened. Home and picked some flowers for the house as it was beginning to blow hard. The lawn looks very nice. Cut it for about the last time this year. Sam went to Shelton and got a lot of errands done. We went over to Allyn dock in p.m. to do some measuring of stuff they are going to need to replace. Went to Skenes and visited until 7 when I went home and Sam went to port meeting about float. To bed early.

Tuesday, Oct. 1, 1946

No entry.

Wednesday, Oct. 2, 1946

No entry.



Mary and Sam Theler.
Courtesy photo

■ Clydene Hostetler is a longtime Belfair resident, local historian, media archivist and documentary filmmaker of "Hidden in Plain Sight." She has been researching Mary Theler's life for the past 13 years. She can be emailed at Clydeneh53@gmail.com

Cats: Mission Creek program provides well being

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Simpson said she thinks the program is amazing for everyone involved, helping the cat and the individual learn to love and trust each other.

"Helping these cats/kittens has improved my well-being by changing my focus from what terrible things I have done, which led me to a feeling or attitude of being worthless or bad, so why try," Simpson said in a written statement to the *Herald*. "I am helping a cat learn to trust and love and just be a cat again. So, they can go to a forever home, what they need most is time, which I have a lot of and now my time is being used for something good."

The cats come from many places and are a variety of ages. Most of the volunteers in the program have previous experience with cats.

"Growing up in Amanda Park, it is pretty rural," inmate Davina Gilroy said in a written statement. "We had domesticated cats and feral or barn cats that stayed outside in my 49 years of life. I have witnessed a lot of kittens be born as well as care for them."

The humane societies needed help fostering cats and MCCCW had room.

"Us being able to help house and socialize them is a huge benefit to Mason County," MCCCW program helper KT Roede said. "It's also a huge benefit to the incarcerated individuals too. It makes them feel more normalization, they get to take care of another living thing and the comfort of it and learning a new skill."

The program wasn't available during the beginning of the pandemic, and there was a loss of interest in the program during that time but once the cats came back, the interest came back.

The cats are popular among staff and visitors.

"When we have people visit MCCCW and they find out we have cats, they all want to see the cats," Everitt said. "When staff are in the unit, they like to see and pet the cats. Some of the population, in the past, have had some behavioral issues, but once they get into the program and get a cat, they have stayed in compliance with policy and the rules because of the cats. It's a great benefit, they know they get a cat and get to live with a cat, something they weren't thinking about when they came to



Inmate Trina Junkert pets her cat, Bonnie, recently at Mission Creek Corrections Center for Women in Belfair. Courtesy photo

prison."

The plan is to expand the program, but that requires a policy change, since the program was written for another facility and it doesn't fit all the needs of the Humane Society's MCCCW contracts, according to Everitt.

"Waking up to a cat laying right next to me puts a smile on my face," inmate Heather Opel said in a written statement. "It makes me feel good to know that I'm saving an animal's life so that it can go onto its forever home after having rehabilitated them."

In order to get them adoption ready, they must get the cats healthy, getting control of any health problems they may have. The kittens need to be socialized and they also must reach 2 pounds, and then they are ready to be put up for adoption. The Humane Society handles the adoption and provides all the supplies while they're being fostered.

"My favorite part is getting to find out the quirky personalities of my cats by allowing them to feel

comfortable enough to do so," inmate Trina Junkert said in a written statement to the *Herald*. "These are my first cats and they came here terrified and very unsocialized. They are so full of personality now and it's amazing."

Everitt said they've had hundreds of cats adopted that have been in the program. Staff has adopted some of the cats and some of the incarcerated individuals' families will adopt a cat through the humane societies.

MCCCW also has programs for butterflies and bees and all those programs have helped improve staff and inmates' morale.

"Roede mentioned that sometimes, working in prisons and being in prison isn't positive. It can be a fairly negative place," Everitt said. "Having positive programs like cats, bees, the butterflies, all the stuff we do with animals is always positive. It's always a good experience and the more programs we can have like that, the better for all the individuals involved."

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