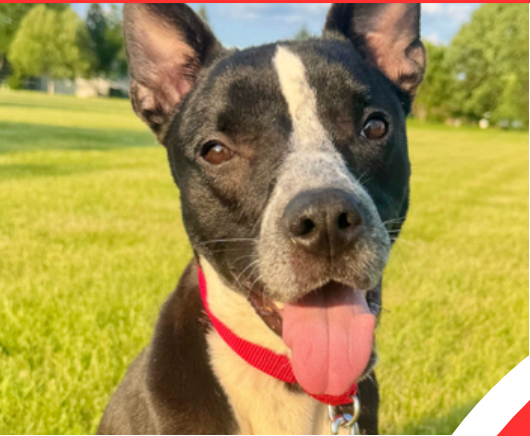




HEARTLAND
Animal Shelter

Annual Report

2025



HEARTLAND ANIMAL SHELTER

Heartlandanimalshelter.org
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847-296-6400

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586 Palwaukee Drive
Wheeling, IL 60090

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ABOUT US

OUR MISSION

Heartland Animal Shelter provides excellent care to the most vulnerable dogs and cats until we find them good homes. Through progressive programs, outreach, and collaborative partnerships, we also work to keep all companion animals with their families.

STRATEGIC PLAN

In 2024, Heartland launched a five-point Strategic Plan, shaped by staff, volunteers, fosters, donors, and community input. This plan guides operations with clear metrics, while the Board of Directors monitors quarterly progress.



FUNDING

Ensure long-term financial stability in an increasingly challenging environment



OPERATIONS

Continuously improve shelter operations



PEOPLE

Invest in the people who support our operations



COMMUNICATIONS & MARKETING

Create and implement effective and consistent communications and branding to all internal and external stakeholders



COMMUNITIES & PARTNERSHIPS

Extend our services by investing more in community and partner-oriented foster and diversion programs



**REVIEW THE
STRATEGIC PLAN**

OUR VALUES

COMPASSIONATE:

We are compassionate members of our community who equally value serving our animal friends and their human guardians.

COMMUNITY-ORIENTED:

We believe in cultivating a community-oriented approach with our stakeholders to provide a network of support, resources, and advocacy for homeless pets in need.

RESPECTFUL:

We hold the value of respect as a cornerstone of our mission, ensuring that every interaction with our animals, staff, volunteers, and community reflects a deep consideration for the dignity and worth of all.

COLLABORATIVE:

We work together and learn from each other to make Heartland the best it can be. We collaborate, listen, share ideas, and share feedback in the spirit of continuous improvement.

SAFE:

We are committed to fostering a safe, low-stress, and fear-free environment for animals and humans alike. We model safe handling and minimize anxiety with humane and respectful treatment of the animals in our care.

TRUSTWORTHY:

We create a foundation of trust by being transparent and accountable to all stakeholders. We honor our commitments and support one another with empathy and honesty.

INTEGRITY:

Our decisions, practices, and policies are shaped by the unwavering commitment to do what is right and ethical.

WELCOME



MESSAGE FROM Jenny Schlueter, Executive Director

As we reflect on 2025, I am deeply grateful for the resilience and dedication of the Heartland community. It was a challenging year for many, shaped by a difficult political and economic climate, ongoing pressures in animal welfare, and personal hardships for many of us. In that context, our accomplishments feel especially meaningful because they were hard-won.

In our first year back in the shelter following the devastating June 2024 flood, Heartland welcomed more than 1,300 dogs and cats and found loving homes for 1,252 animals. While we hoped the year would feel easier, rebuilding, settling back in, and continuing to expand our operations demanded extraordinary effort from an already stretched team.

In 2025, we strengthened our in-house medical program to improve care for animals on site, expanded our mission advancement and marketing efforts, hosted another record-breaking Golden Paw Gala, and achieved a long-held dream by purchasing and developing a new yard next door. Seeing our dogs enjoy that space is a powerful reminder of why this work matters.

Thank you for standing with us through the challenges. With 2026 underway, we look forward to re-engaging volunteers, welcoming more animals, and continuing to grow together. Your support makes it all possible.



MESSAGE FROM C.J. Sultz, President Board of Directors

Each year, I continue to be amazed at everything Heartland accomplishes, thanks to our dedicated volunteers and amazing staff, led by Jenny. This success is also driven by a special group of volunteers—the HAS Board of Directors.

Some newer volunteers may not be aware of our Board's evolution from a founding board to a governing board. For the first 17 years, the HAS Board was small (up to 7 people), made up of volunteers and members of the founding Preiser family, all deeply passionate and focused on keeping HAS running through challenging years.

Today, our governing board is larger and more diverse, follows governance best practices, has a strong focus on fundraising, and is ultimately responsible for ensuring the organization achieves its mission.

By doing the hard, governance-focused work to elevate the Board, we are better positioned to address opportunities and challenges strategically. Jenny's mention of 2025 accomplishments—hiring additional medical and mission advancement staff and purchasing the side play yard—reflects thoughtful Board evaluation that was undertaken to ensure fiscal responsibility and alignment with our mission.

In 2026, we will revisit the HAS Strategic Plan with an eye toward dreaming bigger, thanks to the generosity of Sara L. Adler and the endowment established through her 2025 bequest. We will focus on expanding our impact while maintaining excellence in our core work.

Thank you to Board members Paige Anderson, Tom Bohn, Alisa Brill, Amy Downey, John Fairbairn, Shawn Fitzgerald, Andy Kopon, Deysi Rodriguez, Jenny Schlueter, Rick Schweiger, and Sharon Zuiker for their continued dedication. We look forward to welcoming new Directors at the Annual Meeting!

During 2025, we had the opportunity to purchase the property adjacent to the shelter and turn it into a fenced dog playyard.



2025 HIGHLIGHTS

In 2025, Heartland met record needs with record results. We welcomed **1,325 animals—498 dogs and 827 cats**—from shelters across Illinois, nine other states (AL, AR, IN, KY, LA, NE, TN, TX, and WI), and Puerto Rico, the highest intake in our history. Since opening in 2002, we have welcomed more than **20,000 animals**.

Despite the increase in 2025, Heartland achieved a **98.4% live release rate**, up from 97.7% in 2024, while significantly **reducing average days available for adoption** (cats from 29 to 23 days; dogs from 28 to 14 days).

Expanded **in-house medical care**, supported by shelter renovations completed after the June 2024 flood, allowed for improved quarantine and treatment. With two veterinarians on-site each week, we provided **905 surgeries**, including 802 spays/neuters, as well as dentals, amputations, enucleations, and mass removals.

We also strengthened our **behavior and enrichment programs**, offering structured daily enrichment for dogs and cats. From colony rooms and new TVs for cats, to playgroups, field trips, and enrichment feeding for dogs—made possible with partners like Doggie-Do-Rite, Happy Hounds University, Splash Dog, and Rover's Place—our animals received the support needed to thrive and find new homes.

In the fall, we took a major step toward a long-held dream of increasing the dog enrichment program by expanding our outdoor space. Thanks to the great generosity of the late Sara L. Adler, we purchased the vacant property south of the shelter and built a **new dog play yard**.

These efforts led to a record **1,252 adoptions**, up from 1,078 the previous year. Reduced fee and off-site adoption events played a key role, through partnerships with PetSmart Charities, Petco Love, and Muller Auto Group. We also participated in campaigns, including Clear the Shelters, Empty the Shelters, Best Friends National Adoption Weekend, Subaru Loves Pets, Angels with Tails, and Chicago Humane Coalition's Super Adoption Saturday.



There's nothing more exciting than a trip to Chicago Animal Care & Control to pick up animals who have been waiting for rescue.

CHICAGO ANIMAL CARE & CONTROL

In 2025, Chicago Animal Care & Control (CACC) transferred a record-breaking 9,084 animals to rescue partners—the highest number of lifesaving transfers in more than 10 years. As part of CACC's rescue network, Heartland helps create a critical safety net for the city's most vulnerable animals.

Heartland was proud to be one of CACC's top five rescue partners in 2025, taking in 162 dogs and 367 cats. Every transfer opens space at the city shelter, allowing CACC to continue serving the community.

Below: In August, we transferred 37 cats from CACC to Heartland in a single day.



2025 BY THE NUMBERS

INTAKES

Animals arrived at Heartland

1,325



Intakes ▲ from 1,204 in 2024

Dogs ▲ 16% Cats ▲ 5%

INTAKE CATEGORIES

Transferred In	71%
Strays	17%
Relinquished by Owner	12%

INTAKE PARTNERS



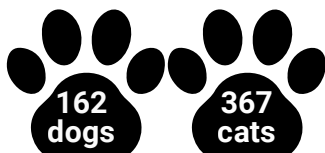
We helped shelters throughout Illinois, nine other states, and Puerto Rico.

TOP PARTNER



CACC

Chicago Animal Care & Control



HEARTLAND
Animal Shelter

AVERAGE DAYS AVAILABLE

DAYS

Dogs: 14

▼ 14 days vs 2024

Cats: 23

▼ 6 days vs 2024

3,506

Donors supported Heartland in 2025

19,986

Hours of work by Heartland volunteers

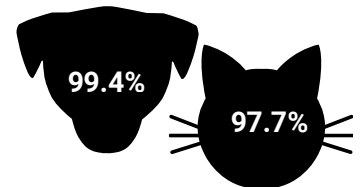
274

Foster homes provided 22,373 days of care

OUTCOMES

98.4%

Live Release Rate (LRR)



▲ from 97.7% in 2024

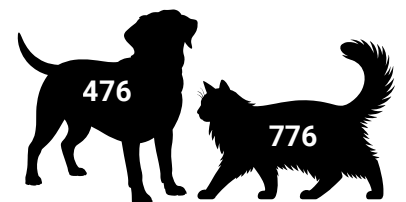
LRR=live outcomes divided by total outcomes

OUTCOME CATEGORIES

Adoption	94%
Returned to Owner	2%
Transferred Out	1%
Other	3%

ADOPTIONS

1,252



▲ from 1,078 in 2024

VOLUNTEERS/FOSTERS

VOLUNTEERS

Volunteers are at the heart of everything we do at Heartland, and their contributions continue to grow in impact.

After we moved back into the shelter building in early 2025, volunteers returned in full force, with 486 volunteers contributing 19,986 hours to support our pets and expand our organization's capacity.

During 2025, 268 volunteers dedicated 8,627 hours caring for dogs, while 250 volunteers contributed 6,116 hours caring for cats. The remaining volunteers and hours supported events, fundraising, and other critical activities.

Heartland volunteers do everything from facilitating adoptions and running events to writing thank-you notes to donors. This year, we expanded training and opportunities and developed a formal process to recruit volunteers for event planning and fundraising.

We also continued to engage our volunteer community through orientations, training opportunities, and appreciation events, ensuring they are supported, celebrated, and empowered to make a lasting impact.

FOSTERS

Heartland's foster families provide loving, safe environments where animals can heal, decompress, and learn what it means to live in a home.

Fosters play a critical role in our lifesaving work—by opening up space in the shelter, they allow us to welcome more animals while keeping pets happier, healthier, and more adoptable.

In 2025, 274 foster homes provided 22,373 days of care, including 369 dogs and 503 cats, making an extraordinary impact on our animals and helping Heartland save more lives than ever.



Above: Heartland staff and volunteers hosted four free wellness clinics in 2025.

STAFF



Above: The Heartland staff at our 2025 holiday party.

OUR TEAM IS GROWING!

In 2025 we welcomed Dr. Nevis and Dr. Emily Yacker to our team. Dr. Nevis focuses on surgeries and Dr. Yacker triages some of our toughest medical cases. Providing more comprehensive medical care in-house means that we also added one full and part-time medical support staff (Amanda and Alejandra).

We also added to our Mission Advancement and Marketing team (Jessica and Maribeth) and our programs teams (Michele and Kerry).

Growing our team allows us to expand our reach, help more vulnerable animals in need, and work more efficiently and effectively. It also ensures that our staff are as supported and cared for as the animals we serve—something essential to maintaining continuity, preventing burnout, and fostering a positive workplace culture.



THE HEARTLAND STAFF

(As of May 2026)

- **Olga Bernad** – Marketing Manager, Social Media
- **Shannon Chavez** – Animal Care Attendant
- **Abby Damaszk** – Lead Animal Care Attendant & Operations Assistant
- **Oscar Damaszk** – Animal Care Attendant
- **Edie Eiseman** – Business Operations Manager
- **Danielle Gordon** – Marketing Associate
- **Eric Gordon** – Dog Adoption Lead
- **Jessica Grosskopf** – Mission Advancement Manager, Data & Finance
- **Carrie Johnson** – Behavior & Enrichment Manager
- **Natalia Katny** – Animal Care Attendant
- **Aurora Leon-Avila** – Senior Medical Technician
- **Michele McKenna** – Cat Pathway Specialist
- **Dr. Jennifer Nevis** – Veterinarian
- **Jenny Nogle** – Program Coordinator
- **Kerry Panzone** – Cat Program Manager
- **Amanda Ranallo** – Medical Manager
- **Courtney Robinson** – Mission Advancement & Marketing Director
- **Allyson Rosenthal** – Director of Shelter Operations
- **Maribeth Santiago** – Mission Advancement Associate, Events and Foundations
- **Jenny Schlueter** – Executive Director
- **Foster Seifert** – Animal Care Attendant
- **Mia Seifert** – Program Lead/Adoption Partnerships
- **Alejandra Soriano** – Medical Technician
- **Annika Swanson** – Animal Care Attendant
- **Carina Vargas-Carretes** – Animal Care Attendant
- **Mary Wozencraft** – Shelter Operations Manager
- **Dr. Emily Yacker** – Veterinarian

COMMUNICATIONS/MARKETING

HEARTLAND'S REACH

SOCIAL MEDIA

44,000

Combined Followers

Facebook

24,000 followers
9,554,005 views

Engagement up
37% vs. 2024

Instagram

17,600 followers

TikTok

3,926 followers
93,000 likes

DIGITAL NEWSLETTER

18,704

Subscribers

585,298 total
emails sent

136 email
campaigns

WEBSITE

950,217

Pageviews

2,610 average
daily pageviews

Heartland's marketing strategy builds awareness and support for our mission through compelling animal stories, strong social media engagement, targeted program outreach, and campaigns that drive adoptions, volunteers, fosters, and fundraising.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media is a vital tool for Heartland, allowing us to share our mission, celebrate our animals, and connect with supporters in real time. In the coming year, we plan to continue strengthening our presence on established platforms while growing newer channels including LinkedIn, Bluesky, Threads, and our YouTube channel.

WEBSITE

Our website (heartlandanimalshelter.org) serves as a central hub, with a redesign planned for relaunch in Summer 2026.

EMAIL

Email remains a key strategy for engaging our audience. We send a monthly email newsletter along with targeted messages promoting events and fundraising campaigns.

PRINT

In September 2025, the Heartbeat Newsletter transitioned to a fully digital format. This shift supports sustainability efforts while preserving strategic use of print for the campaign letters and postcards that remain essential for engaging supporters who prefer traditional mail.

INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS

The primary tool for communicating with volunteers and fosters is a weekly email newsletter with more than 700 subscribers, supplemented by Facebook groups and regular meetings.

EVENTS

Hundreds of adopters, volunteers, and supporters joined us at events throughout the year, including:



COMMUNITY/PARTNERSHIPS

Heartland continues to support community members and their pets, with a focus on keeping animals healthy, cared for, and in their homes whenever possible.

POP-UP PET FOOD PANTRY

Heartland launched a pop-up pet food pantry in December 2025. Since then, we have provided free dog and cat food and other supplies to more than 300 households in need. Open on the first and third Sundays of each month, the pantry plays a vital role in preventing pet surrender and strengthening the human-animal bond.

VACCINE CLINICS

Through its partnership with Cook County Animal and Rabies Control and the generous support of a Petco Love grant, Heartland successfully hosted four free wellness clinics in 2025.

These events served over 500 local pets, providing essential DAPPV, FVRCP, and rabies vaccinations, along with microchipping services. By removing financial and logistical barriers, these clinics played a vital role in keeping our community's animals healthy and protected.

PETSMART

Last fall, we launched an exciting new partnership with PetSmart Northbrook, and it's already making a meaningful difference for our cats.

PetSmart provides a welcoming in-store cat habitat with multi-level enclosures, cozy privacy cubbies and perches, plus a meet-and-greet room. It's a space designed to help our cats shine and connect with potential families.

Thanks to this collaboration, many of our feline friends have found loving homes—and many others are now getting the chance to meet an entirely new community of adopters.



WALK OF LOVE 2025

On June 28, 2025, the Heartland community gathered at Potawatomi Woods for our annual Walk of Love. This year's event was more than just a 2K walk; it was a celebration of the "steps" we take together to rescue and rehome animals in need. Walk of Love achieved record-breaking fundraising success, raising more than \$33,000, a 100% increase over the prior year!

THE GOLDEN PAW GALA

On October 17, 2025, the Golden Paw Gala served as the anchor of our fundraising efforts, bringing our community together for an unforgettable night of generosity. This year's theme, A Legacy of Love, featured a moving tribute to the late Sara L. Adler, recipient of the 2025 Grateful Heart Award. Her historic gift—the largest in Heartland's history—was celebrated as a cornerstone for our long-term stability. Beyond the evening's festivities, 2025 marked a historic milestone as the Gala reached a cumulative total of \$1M raised since the event's inception.



FINANCIAL SUPPORT

THE COST OF CARE

The average cost to care for an animal at Heartland from the time they enter the shelter until adoption is about \$500 for younger animals and \$1,000 for animals seven years or older.

UNPRECEDENTED GENEROSITY

This year, Heartland Animal Shelter experienced a historic surge in support, culminating in a total revenue of \$3,441,563.

This achievement was driven by a powerful mix of long-term legacy planning, major gifts, and a highly engaged grassroots community.

With over 7,284 individual gifts processed this year, every dollar has been a brick in the wall of safety we build for our animals. From the \$1,881 in Adoption Sponsorships to the million-dollar legacies, this year proves that Heartland is truly a community-powered shelter.

THE POWER OF A LASTING LEGACY

The most significant pillar of our financial health this year was the incredible impact of Bequests, which totaled \$2,240,198.

These legacy gifts represent a profound commitment to our mission, ensuring that the love our supporters have for animals today will continue to provide safety and care for years to come.

MAJOR GIFTS & STRATEGIC GIVING

Our community of dedicated philanthropists showed up in a major way. Major Gifts (\$1,000+) contributed over \$220,000. Furthermore, the Adler Endowment distribution added a vital \$98,000, providing the stable foundation needed to invest in the future.

CELEBRATING HEARTLAND'S HEARTBEAT

While large gifts provided the foundation, our everyday supporters provided the momentum.

Our Holiday Giving campaign was a standout success, raising \$122,806 during the season of giving. We also saw remarkable participation through:

- **Heartland Heroes:** \$34,332 raised through our monthly giving program.
- **Employee Giving & Matching:** Nearly \$59,000 generated by supporters and their employers, doubling the impact of individual compassion.
- **Tribute Giving:** Almost \$30,000 donated in honor or memory of loved ones and beloved pets.
- **Heartland Young Professionals Board (HYP):** More than \$27,500 raised through various events, dine-to-donates, and merchandise sales.

REVENUE RAISED

\$3.44M

Record-breaking year

\$2.24M

Bequests / Legacy

\$220K+

Major Gifts (\$1,000+)

\$98K

Adler Distribution

COMMUNITY GIVING

7,284

Individual gifts

\$122,806 Holiday Giving

\$34,332 Heartland Heroes

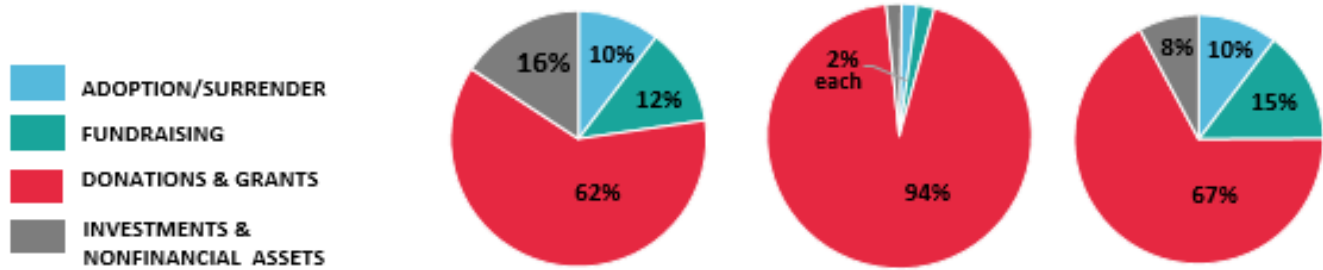
\$59,000 Employee Giving

\$30,000 Tribute Giving

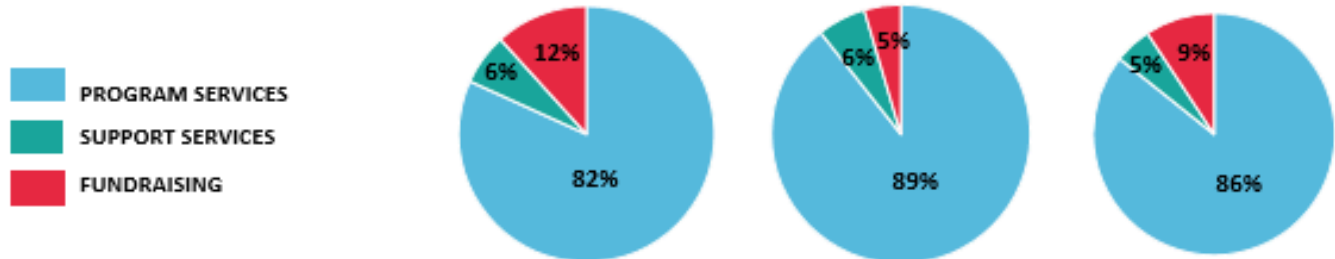
\$27,511 HYP Board

AUDITED FINANCIAL REPORTS

	749 adoptions	1,140 adoptions	960 adoptions
REVENUE AND SUPPORT	Audited DRAFT 6/1/25-12/31/25	Audited 6/1/24-5/31/25	Audited 6/1/23-5/31/24
Adoption/Surrender Fees	\$153,613	\$160,311	\$152,495
Fundraising (net of expenses)	\$181,974	\$181,203	\$214,623
Donations & Grants	\$909,526	\$8,005,988	\$990,418
Investments & Other Assets	\$233,315	\$160,226	\$115,570
Total Revenue	\$1,478,428	\$8,507,728	\$1,473,106



Programs Services	\$954,681	\$2,126,478	\$1,090,708
Supporting Services	\$75,792	\$144,332	\$63,528
Fundraising	\$136,913	\$108,965	\$118,267
Total Expenses	\$1,167,386	\$2,379,775	\$1,272,503



Program Services include: wages (75-80%), animal care expenses, operations/occupancy

Support Services include: wages (5-10%), accounting/legal fees, administrative expenses

Fundraising includes: wages (15%), fundraising costs, etc.

For further details on what is included in these expenses, see our annual financials statements.

NET ASSETS	Audited DRAFT 6/1/25-12/31/25	Audited 6/1/24-5/31/25	Audited 6/1/23-5/31/24
Beginning Of Fiscal Year	\$7,912,426	\$1,784,462	\$1,583,859
End Of Fiscal Year	\$8,223,468	\$7,912,426	\$1,784,462
LIABILITIES			
Current Liabilities	\$137,616	\$128,117	\$77,435
Long Term Liabilities	\$437,517	\$431,202	\$446,111
TOTAL CASH & INVESTMENTS	\$7,004,813	\$7,191,047	\$970,719

A copy of the organizations's Form 990 is on file at 586 Palwaukee Drive, Wheeling, IL.



MISSION MOMENTS

PHISH AND SOPHIE

At Heartland Animal Shelter, we believe every animal deserves the opportunity to thrive, regardless of the challenges they have faced. Sophie, a gentle and soulful dog, and Phish, an energetic orange kitten, are two remarkable examples of resilience and second chances.

Sophie suffered a traumatic leg injury caused by a freak accident. Despite her pain, she greeted everyone she met with curiosity and a wagging tail. After careful evaluation, our veterinary team determined that amputation would offer her the greatest relief and the best opportunity for a comfortable, active future.

Phish's journey began on the streets of Chicago, where one of our rescue partners found him as a tiny kitten struggling to move because of a severely injured back leg. Like Sophie, Phish underwent amputation surgery to give him the best chance to heal and live a full, happy life.

Both surgeries were successful, but their transformations extended far beyond physical recovery. In foster care, Sophie quickly adapted to life on three legs, gaining confidence with every step. Phish went to a foster home after surgery, wasting no time embracing kittenhood — racing through rooms, chasing toys, and discovering joy within days.

Stories like Sophie's and Phish's are made possible through Heartland's Dr. Do More Fund, which provides lifesaving and specialized medical care for animals with complex needs beyond routine treatment.

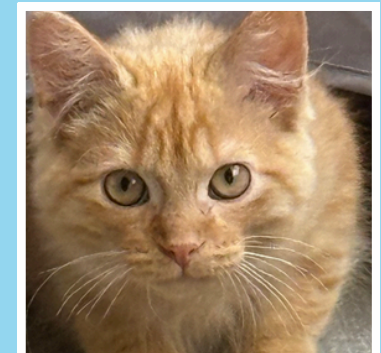
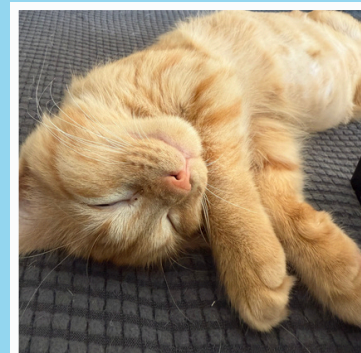
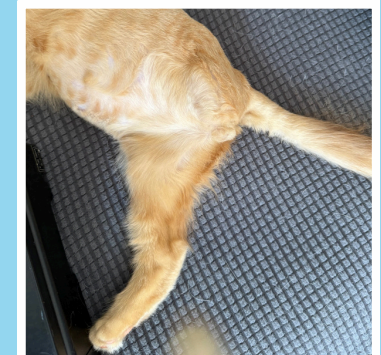
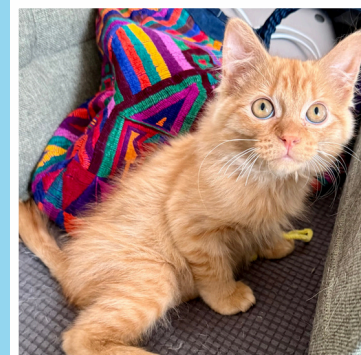
Thanks to the generosity of our donors, pets like Sophie and Phish receive the compassionate care and second chances they deserve.

Sophie



Sophie following surgery and with her new family.

Phish



Phish recovered in a foster home following his leg amputation.

