

# Creating an awareness for animal care



Chan with one of her 12 cats, Indy, which she rescued and nursed back to health.



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**MATHEMATICS** lecturer Chan Kah Yein, who teaches in a private college in the Klang Valley, has always had a soft spot for animals. Little did she know this would become more than a pastime.

Since her childhood days, the daughter of a Public Works Department officer in Kampar and Kuala Kangsar, was never without a pet. Her menagerie included dogs, chicks, ducklings, rabbits and geese.

Her compassion for animals deepened in 2006, when she chanced across a litter of three newborn kittens abandoned next to a playground.

"I could not possibly leave them there, so I brought them home."

Never having had close encounters with cats before, she called Paws Animal Welfare Society and was informed the newborns would not likely survive without their mother.

"Paws then told me what to do, including feeding them small amounts of milk and wiping their mouths clean to prevent infection.

"Together with my then 18-year-old daughter, we looked after them and all the kittens survived."

Encouraged by the incident, Chan began to rescue more kittens whenever she could but was impeded by a lack of funds. A defining moment for her came in 2009.

In May that year, unable to control the alarming number of stray dogs in their village, the people of Pulau Ketam, Selangor decided to send 300 of the animals to two uninhabited islands nearby. Isolated and starving for several weeks, some of the strays turned on each other. This came to the attention of animal rights NGOs who managed to rescue a number of the dogs.

The Pulau Ketam incident motivated Chan to start AnimalCare Society.



Chan feeding Tabs, which is either a stray or an abandoned pet while her other cat helps itself to the food.

In its first year, the organisation managed to help neuter, rehome and provide medical treatment for 660 animals. Since then, the society has raised almost RM880,000 to neuter 7,124 animals and provide medical assistance for some 2,218.

Chan credits community geriatrician, Dr Tan Chek Wee, an acquaintance from Singapore, for her progress. He taught her the trap-neuter-return-manage method. From this, Chan eventually developed her own concept which she calls the care, neuter, rehome/return, manage method.

Her method encourages the public to begin by looking after street animals in their immediate surroundings by feeding them and taking an interest in their wellbeing. They are encouraged to bring the animals to a vet for neutering, after which the animal can be rehomed.

If rehoming fails, the animal can be returned to its original colony along the streets. This could only be done as long

as the caregivers continue to provide and look after them, and if those living nearby do not object, said Chan.

Her model has also been adopted by the Paws with Chan's consent. The society was granted RM150,000 in April by the Selangor government to subsidise the neutering of pets and strays.

"I cannot stress enough the seriousness and urgency of neutering street animals, as they breed exponentially. Cats can breed up to four times annually, with three to seven per litter. Dogs only breed twice yearly, but can have up to 12 puppies per litter.

"Existing animal NGOs do their best to assist but can only do so much in light of these numbers. Ignorance, a lack of exposure and initiative to learn and do better for their pets are the main obstacles in raising awareness among the public," she said.

On the issue of pets being abandoned,

**Just as one does not abandon one's child, one should not abandon one's pet on a whim.**

— Chan

Chan said it is commonplace.

"Owning a pet is akin to welcoming a new family member into the household. Adoptions are meant to be for life, and the public must be educated that animals are as conscious as we are, capable of experiencing pain and suffering. Just as one does not abandon one's child, one should not abandon one's pet on a whim."

Chan said more effort is needed in properly enforcing laws against animal cruelty such as the Animal Welfare Act 2015.

"Speedy investigations into and prosecution against animal cruelty are needed. I hope our lawmakers will broaden the definition of compassion to include caring for strays alongside pets as well."

Chan's greatest motivation in continuing her work is the impact she has made through her writings on her blog at [myanimalcare.org](http://myanimalcare.org) and in her books, which are printed for free distribution.

To-date, she has released five books about the importance of kindness to animals, with more than 70,000 copies distributed throughout Malaysia and beyond.