



## Zorgbeest

### 1. Selection of the cats

- Age:
  - Cats should be at least 1 year old, the age of social maturity in cats (Lefebvre et al., 2008).
  - Cats need a well-earned rest from around the age of 8 years or when they first start showing signs of difficulties with AAI. Older cats are less able to cope with social stress factors (Horváth et al., 2008).
  - It is recommended to keep older cats in their familiar environment but not to involve them anymore deliberately in the AAI sessions. Leave it to the appreciation of the cats to choose whether they want to stay in their resting place, leave the AAI room or be present at the AAI session.
  - Introduce cats of different ages to create a natural turnover.
- Breed:
  - The selection of an AAI cat is based mainly on the cat's temperament and experience and very little on the breed.
  - Street cats can be as suitable as pedigree cats.
- Temperament:
  - The ideal temperament for an AAI cat is:
    - friendly and seeks contact with people
    - cheerful, playful, likes to be stimulated
    - accepts to be touched and caressed
    - is in confidence
    - alert
    - predictable
    - can adapt to new people and situations
    - is social with other cats
    - able to walk around calmly in a busy environment.
  - Behaviour tests can be helpful in determining if the cat is suitable as a residential cat to participate in AAI sessions. Have a cat behaviour specialist carry out these tests. Ideally the test should be carried out in the environment where the cat will permanently be staying in the future.
- Experience and training
  - During the cat's socialisation period (until approximately 9 weeks of age) it is important that the cat has frequent, positive contact with people, other cats, other animals and experiences different environments (ESAAT 2010: Principles for animal-assisted work with domestic animals and pets).
  - The cat must be properly socialized without being over-stimulated, which can also lead to stress.
  - It is important that the cat is used to staying indoors.
  - Obedience training can be part of the preparations for AAI cats but is not essential (Coppinger, Coppinger & Skillings, 1998).
- Number
  - Minimum two. The number of cats depends on the available space and escape routes



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but also whether the cats can cope with each other.