

# Helping Shelter Cats Thrive, One (Double) Cage at a Time

Countless cats in shelters across the country are living happier and healthier lives thanks to the continued work of Dr. Denae Wagner, an associate veterinarian with the UC Davis Koret Shelter Medicine Program, a donor-funded program that operates under the CCAH umbrella.

Two research studies conducted by Dr. Wagner and her colleagues—and funded by the Morris Animal Foundation with additional support from the CCAH—found a strong connection between the size and configuration of a shelter's cat cages and the health and well-being of the animals they house. Cats kept in traditional 2x2 foot cages lack the ability to keep their living and elimination spaces separate. They also have a much higher incidence of upper respiratory infection (URI), an illness often triggered by the stress of being handled and moved frequently while their cages are cleaned.

"URI is very common among shelter cats," Dr. Wagner explains. "Shelters have been plagued by the problem for so long that they've felt like there was nothing they could do about it." The solution, Dr. Wagner found, is double-compartment housing—essentially, two connected cages that give cats more space, enable them to be handled less frequently, and help cut down significantly on the incidence of URI.

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So far, Dr. Wagner has helped dozens of animal shelters design new cat housing areas based on these findings. She has also created "portals"—round devices that can be installed between adjacent cages to turn two cages into one double-compartment cage—that enable shelters to remodel existing housing at very low cost. "I love hearing from little rural shelters that have modified their cages based on our instruction and advice," she says. "Our work remodeling on cat housing has touched hundreds of shelters, which is very gratifying."

Dr. Wagner is working hard to get these portals—which she makes herself out of PVC pipe—manufactured. Meanwhile, many of the cage manufacturers have shown interest in her work and are designing new cat housing for animal shelters as well. Says Dr. Wagner: "It is a key part of the overall picture of making life better for cats in all animal shelters."



Learn more about the impact of shelter design on animal health in our Q+A with Dr. Wagner, posted on the CCAH website: [www.vetmed.ucdavis.edu/ccah/health-information/newsletter/news\\_supplements.cfm](http://www.vetmed.ucdavis.edu/ccah/health-information/newsletter/news_supplements.cfm)