The National Humane Review

A Quarterly Journal for Friends of American Humane

AMERICAN HUMANE

Protecting Children & Animals Since 1877

Fall 2008

Winter 2008

Every day, American Humane's Office of Public Policy in Washington, D.C., receives calls from citizens all across the country asking for help. We have been asked to locate low-cost spay/neuter services, give guidance on how to get help for malnourished pigs at a nearby farm, and respond to questions or concerns about a local animal shelter. We have even received requests to take in pets people feel they need to relinquish.

We try to help every person who calls by providing local information and offering solutions that are in the best interests of the animals. These calls give us a sense of the issues people are facing every day, and they provide another way of identifying trends — which helps us determine where legislative and public policy voids exist and what we can do to empower people to help animals.

Troubled Times for People and Pets

A recent trend has been with people struggling to keep their pets during these difficult financial times. We hear of some people who forgo purchasing their medication or eating properly so they can afford pet food. Or a senior citizen who has given half of her daily food from Meals on Wheels to her cat because giving up the comfort of a beloved companion animal is not an option. We even receive calls from people who have found a pet abandoned in a home and need assistance to get help for that animal.

But instead of abandoning a pet in a foreclosed home or rushing to a decision to surrender a pet for financial reasons, people should realize that they have other options. The human-animal bond is too strong to risk adding the emotional distress of giving up a pet on top of current financial troubles.

Changing Your Financial Lifestyle

Following are some tips that may help you or others in your community keep their pets.

- Don't be afraid to discuss your financial situation with your veterinarian and ask him or her to prescribe only those vaccinations or treatments which are critical to your pet's health. If the cost is higher than what you can immediately pay, ask your veterinarian for a payment plan.
- Reduce or eliminate luxury items for your pets, including treats and toys, and reduce visits to the groomer or dog spa. If your pet requires frequent grooming or bathing, consider learning how to handle these tasks yourself, or ask your local animal shelter or rescue organization if a volunteer can provide the service for a reduced fee.
- If you are struggling to pay your pet sitter or dog walker, consider asking family, friends or neighbors (including responsible older children) to pet sit or dog walk, so you can reduce or eliminate those costs.

- Check with your local Meals on Wheels to see if pet food is available through the organization's "We All Love Our Pets" initiative. With support from the Banfield Charitable Trust, grants are available to local Meals on Wheels agencies to provide pet food to clients. For more information, visit *www.mowaa.org*.

What Animal Welfare Professionals Can Do to Help

Animal shelters and rescue organizations are already feeling the strain from the normal seasonal influx of pets, as well as pets being relinquished due to financial hardship and foreclosures. Those organizations want people to be able to keep their pets because it is better for the pets and the people, and it reduces the strain on their resources. Here are some ideas to help shelters and rescue groups keep people and their pets together:

- If your organization obtains pet food at a fraction of the retail cost, consider offering excess food to pet owners in need. Also, check with your local pet food store to see if extra bags of pet food or broken/damaged bags or cans of food can be made available to pet owners who need assistance.
- Many cities have a pet food bank or "pet food pantry" that provides free food for pets. If your community offers that service, consider advertising the information on your organization's website so pet owners know that help is available. Also, consider hosting a pet food pantry drive in your community to raise money or collect pet food to benefit pet owners who need assistance.

- If your organization receives reduced-fee veterinary services for your animals, consider extending those lower-cost services to pet owners in your community. If you provide on-site spaying and neutering and/or vaccinations, consider opening up those services to the community. It will help struggling pet owners obtain reduced-cost services, as well as bring in additional funds to your shelter.
- If you have volunteers who are talented groomers or animal trainers, consider offering those services to your community for a small fee.

People and their beloved pets should never have to be separated, especially in a time of crisis. Although many people are feeling the effects of the economic crisis, we are all in this together. And, together, we can help our neighbors in need — and their pets — get through it.

Signed Into Law

The Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act (H.R. 6893) was signed into law on Oct. 7, 2008. It provides better protections for children by reauthorizing the Adoption Incentives Program; increasing incentive payments for special needs and older child adoptions; establishing Kinship Guardianship Assistance and Navigator Programs; requiring states to notify relatives when children enter foster care; encouraging sibling placement; giving states the option to extend assistance payments to age 21; focusing on educational stability and health-care oversight; providing family connection grants; and giving American Indian tribes the same access to these federal funds and programs that states receive.