

Banking on Generosity to Feed Hungry Animals

In hard times, pet food pantries supply a lifeline

BY JAMES HETTINGER



Volunteer Julie Cantowine, left, helps distribute food to a guest at The Pongo Fund Pet Food Bank in downtown Portland, Ore. Also on hand are Laura Amiton, second from left, of the pet foods retailer Healthy Pets Northwest; and Jon Tingle, right, regional manager for Canidae Pet Foods.

The hard economic times continue to make it difficult for some families to put food on the table ... or in their animals' bowls.

To help, dozens of shelters and nonprofit organizations around the country have established pet food banks—providing free food to ease pet owners' financial burdens and maybe keep family companions in their homes.

"You guys are a lifesaver," Donna Messner of Hagerstown, Md., tells food bank volunteers as she picks up a bag of cat food at the twice-monthly pet food bank run by the Humane Society of Washington County. An owner of nine cats, she's part of a steady stream of financially challenged people coming to the humane society's back parking lot on a cold, cloudy December morning for bags of food and litter that volunteers are fetching from two large trucks.

Walking to her car, Messner explains, "With the way the economy is, they've made

it so I can keep my cats." She says she can't find work, and her husband is on disability. "Sometimes it's hard just to keep us in food."

The scene is being repeated in nearly every corner of the nation, from a warehouse in downtown Portland, Ore., to a van in Colorado Springs, Colo., and a pet food pantry at a shelter for people in York County, Maine.

The food banks vary widely in size, scope, and operating methods. They get pallets of food donated from stores and corporations, and single bags from kind-hearted individuals. Some require proof that their clients reside in a particular jurisdiction and receive government assistance; others will serve whoever shows up. Some serve individuals only, while others also provide help to small shelters and rescue groups. But they all report that they're tapping a real and growing need in their communities, and keeping busy largely because of the bad economy.

Animal Sheltering Online

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- More answers to this issue's Coffee Break question are at animalsheltering.org/coffeebreak.
- Go to animalsheltering.org/mouth-pieces to download a poster promoting adoption of smaller shelter pets, such as hamsters, rabbits, mice, etc.
- Read lesson plans for teaching basic commands to shelter dogs at animalsheltering.org/partners_lessons.

"Here in Oregon, the [economic] climate is pretty poor, which means that our cat food bank is a huge success," says Kathy Covey, public relations manager for the Cat Adoption Team (CAT), a felines-only shelter outside Portland that has operated a monthly pet food bank since June 2008. CAT distributed 375 pounds of food in its first month, but by September 2009 it was giving out nearly 2,500 pounds—an increase of more than 500 percent. By November, CAT had provided area cat owners with a total of 22,399 pounds of kitten and cat food. Covey says the numbers have left the CAT staff "just floored."

CAT's food bank, staffed by about 10 volunteers, operates from noon to 2 p.m. on the first Sunday of each month. In the summer, Covey says people begin lining up as early as 8:30 a.m., and a few walk roughly a half mile from the nearest bus stop.

When the food bank first began, Covey cautioned her volunteers against making snap judgments: The person driving up in a nice car, for example, might have bought it before he got laid off. Clients fill out an application form that asks if they're receiving financial as-



Marie Wampler, left, a volunteer at the Humane Society of Washington County's food bank in Maryland, chats with Donna Messner of Hagerstown, Md., who says the food she receives from the program has enabled her to keep her nine cats.



The Cat Adoption Team, a felines-only shelter in Sherwood, Ore., saw an increase of more than 500 percent in the volume of food it distributes to cat owners in financial need. Here, Connie Snow, volunteer leader for the food bank, pulls a bag off a shelf in the organization's warehouse.

sistance, but Covey says for now no proof is required; she's convinced that no one is "trying to get free food just to get free food."

Families can get a month's supply of food for up to four cats, and are allowed to use the food bank for five consecutive months before being asked to take two months off. "We're a temporary fix," Covey explains.

Owners of cats who aren't spayed or neutered are directed to CAT's subsidized program and asked to get the operation done within a few months, Covey says, "because we don't want to feed a breeder."

Family Matters

Several pet food bank organizers say their programs aim to keep animals in the home and out of the shelter at a time when families—facing everything from home foreclosures to rising veterinary bills—might consider giving up their pets.

"We're just trying to keep the families together during this time," says Christine Wiersema, development director for the Idaho Humane Society, which began a pet food pantry in fall 2008 amid reports of families relinquishing their pets because of economic struggles, and even some seniors feeding their Meals on Wheels meals to their pets. The pantry, which distributed about 18 tons of food in its first year, now partners with the local Meals on Wheels program to provide food for 200 seniors' pets.

Wiersema says the food pantry—with 57 collection bins throughout the region, mostly at veterinarians' offices and pet supply stores—has prompted the shelter to do "a little out-of-the-box thinking." The bins are relatively expensive, so the shelter recoups some of the cost by having individuals or organizations sponsor a bin year-round for a \$50 donation.

Some families refuse to give up their animals, no matter how dire their economic circumstances. "We were gearing to the anecdotal situation that people would surrender their animals as times got tough, and I think really what's happened is people have hunkered down with their animals," says Steven Jacobsen, executive director of the Animal Welfare Society in West Kennebunk, Maine. "So what's happened is people have done everything they can to retain their animals, but obviously need some help to do so."

Free food takes some of the economic pressure off the family, possibly preventing animals from becoming a "scapegoat," perceived as siphoning money from the family's other needs, Jacobsen explains.

Giving and Getting

Michele LaVerdiere, a longtime supporter of Jacobsen's shelter, began a program in September 2008 that enables people to donate pet food or money at about eight businesses in the Kennebunk area. The donations are transported to the York County Shelter Programs' Food Pantry, a food bank for humans that also serves as the distribution point for LaVerdiere's pet food pantry. The pet food pantry distributes about 150 to 200 pounds of food per week, and has left LaVerdiere marveling at people's generosity. "When it comes to giving for children and pets," she says, "people are amazingly generous."

Larry Chusid, founder and executive director of The Pongo Fund Pet Food Bank, which operates from a warehouse in downtown Portland, Ore., says he is dumbstruck by the donations of high-quality food his program has received from manufacturers Canidae and Dogswell. "It's more than great. It's necessary," Chusid says. "It's a lifeline to a community that desperately needs a lifeline."

Chusid doesn't envision his program ending anytime soon. "The need in the community is always going to be there," he says, "regardless of what the economy is."

Despite the occasional grumpy recipient, food bank operators say on the whole their clients are extremely grateful for the helping hand. "We've gotten hugs, we've gotten 'God bless you,' we've gotten all sorts of things," says Darlene McCaslin, founder and president of the Pikes Peak Pet Pantry in Colorado Springs, Colo., a nonprofit that distributes food twice a week from a van parked at a sponsoring business.

Back at the Humane Society of Washington County parking lot in Hagerstown, volunteer Jane Kline suspects a higher power might be at work. "I feel blessed that I'm able to help," she says, "and that the food is here to be given." 

[scoop]

Maintaining the Bond

An innovative HSUS program keeps pets and their people together

BY ARNA COHEN



Beth Adelman never met the middle-aged tabby who wasn't using the litter box, the elderly white cat who started howling at night, or the exuberant youngster who attacked his owner's ankles. Her fellow volunteers haven't met them either. And that's the way she likes it.

For Adelman, success is measured by the number of pets who don't show up at the intake desks at New York City's animal shelters—pets like the “evil” cat whose frustrated owner was ready to give up the animal because she'd scratched him. By the end of his conversation with Adelman, the owner had a new perspective. “He had recently found the cat at a gas station, and he didn't know her personality at that point,” Adelman says. “The cat was angry at a strange cat she'd seen out the window, and he happened to get in the way. Once he

recognized the reasons for her behavior, he totally got it.”

Adelman, a cat behaviorist, is one of many professionals who donate their services to Pets for Life New York City, an HSUS pilot program dedicated to helping people resolve problems that otherwise could lead to surrender, abandonment, or neglect of their animals.

The five-year-old program, formerly known as Safety Net, came under The HSUS's oversight in November 2008. It was a natural addition to the organization's longtime efforts to keep pets and people together. “It's another way to combat euthanasia rates, to keep the animals from even coming into the shelters,” says board member Mary Max, a New York City resident who helped coordinate the program's move to The HSUS.

The program has 40 volunteers who answer a hot line and serve as on-site

counselors at the five shelters run by New York City Animal Care and Control. For behavioral issues that require professional help, a crew of experienced trainers and experts provides free phone consultations. A network of 60 foster caregivers provides temporary homes for pets whose owners face hospitalization or short-term housing problems.

“We want to change the perception of animal shelters only as places where you go to give up your pet,” says Jenny Olsen, one of two program co-coordinators. “We want people to know they can get help from us to solve their problems and keep their pets.” The message is getting out: Last year, Pets for Life NYC served 2,106 clients.

Typical client complaints include animals who are too noisy, boisterous, or destructive; don't get along with other pets or people;

or aren't completely housetrained. Lack of funds for vet care and the inability to find pet-friendly housing are also common issues. "There are so many people who give up animals that don't want to, but don't know that there are options," Olsen says.

For the financially strapped, Pets for Life NYC provides referrals for low-cost vet care and spay/neuter services, temporary pet housing, and even transport assistance. Volunteers may help resolve landlord-tenant problems or offer tips for finding new digs where pets are welcome.

Few people turn down the assistance, says Ira Brown, a volunteer on-site counselor. And he sees the difference that the program has made. "Before we had a presence [in the shelters], more animals were being surrendered for reasons that could be prevented. Now we see many more go back home with their owners."

The program is a lifeline for pets like King, a dog whose arthritis was so bad that his owner had to carry him up the stairs to her apartment. She couldn't afford vet care on her limited income, so Pets for Life NYC arranged low-cost vet visits and medication for the dog. He's now able to manage the stairs on his own, and his owner is so grateful that she has become a volunteer herself.

Beyond helping pets and people within their city, volunteers have an added incentive: Their efforts are creating a model for the rest of the nation.

The ultimate goal, says program co-coordinator Joyce Friedman, "is to have a Pets for Life at every shelter in the country, to make them a community resource and change the idea that pets are disposable."

As a first step toward this goal, Olsen and Friedman will conduct a seminar about Pets for Life in May at The HSUS' Animal Care Expo in Nashville, Tenn. The pair will describe their own experiences and provide nuts-and-bolts information to shelter staff on establishing similar programs in their facilities. "Ideally, the seminar will give them everything they need to go back to their shelters and set up their programs," says

Olsen. "And if they need assistance, we're here for them."

Dedicated animal lovers like Adelman are doing their part by influencing one person at a time. "I gave my phone number to the man with the aggressive cat and told him to call me anytime," she says. "He assured me that he would, and then he said, 'Don't you worry. This cat is going to stay with me.'"

Creating a Pets for Life Program

The best way to learn more is to attend the seminar at this year's Animal Care Expo in Nashville! For more information, check out animalsheltering.org/expo.

To set up a program at your shelter, you must evaluate your facility's capabilities and the resources your community has to offer. Use this checklist to determine what you have and what you need:

- One or two people (staff members and/or volunteers) to act as program coordinators
- Capability of setting up a dedicated phone hot line
- Local businesses/professionals willing to provide reduced-cost and/or free services, i.e.
 - veterinarians
 - dog trainers and cat behaviorists
 - boarding kennels
 - pro bono attorneys to offer advice on landlord-tenant issues
- Volunteers to
 - staff the hot line
 - provide on-site counseling to people surrendering pets
 - provide foster homes
 - transport animals
- Printed materials to distribute to the public, with information about
 - the program
 - basic animal care
 - allergies and shedding
 - common cat and dog issues (i.e. scratching, litter box, barking, aggression)
 - spay/neuter education, and local vet care and sterilization resources [AS](#)

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It's a Cat-Help-Cat World

Sanctuary for exotic animals hosts event for adoptable kitties

BY KATINA ANTONIADES



At first glance, the two organizations have plenty in common: Both care for cats. Both call Texas home. They even shared a volunteer: Holly Duval, who worked with both groups before a job transfer moved her family to Canada.

But while the kitties at New Beginnings Cat Rescue are looking for potential adopters to take them in and share their sunbeams, the cats at In-Sync Exotics aren't exactly lap-sized.

Some of them tip the scales at 400 pounds—or more.

Thanks to connections made by Duval, though, the lions and tigers kept at the sanctuary north of Dallas lent a paw to their little buddies last spring, when In-Sync hosted "Big Cats Helping Little Cats," an event that raised awareness for both groups.

In 2007, during Duval's second year as a volunteer with New Beginnings, one of its board members told her about In-Sync. She was eager to work with large animals, so as soon as she could, she started helping out at the sanctuary.

And the assistance was mutual—in early 2009, In-Sync's volunteer coordinator, Chemyn Reaney, sent an e-mail to Angela Corley, president of New Beginnings, inviting the group to hold an off-site adoption day at In-Sync's sanctuary.

Reaney thought it was a natural partnership. "Although we obviously have very different size animals, their volunteers and our volunteers all have a shared interest, which is, of course, cats," says Reaney. "And the people who come visit our cats are animal

people. I thought it'd be interesting to see if we could get them any help adopting out or at least getting the word out about what they do."

As a volunteer-only group, New Beginnings often has a tough time finding enough people to staff such events. Still, Corley says she couldn't pass up the opportunity.

After both organizations' boards approved the proposal, it was time to plan. In March, Corley visited the big-cat sanctuary for a tour and to figure out logistics. Duval happened to be in town at the time and came along to visit the tigers she'd helped raise. Corley says she wasn't worried that her group's cats would be nervous or in any danger, since their cages wouldn't be near the wild cats' enclosures.

Reaney and Corley worked together to put out a press release, and the event details made it into a small local paper and onto area rescue websites. Each organization notified its supporters, and New Beginnings told past adopters and handed out fliers at PetSmart.

On the big day, May 9, rain forced a move indoors, so several New Beginnings volunteers set up tables and cages in the sanctuary's visitor center containing six or seven of the more laid-back adoptable cats. They had brought brochures about the group, volunteer applications, and coupons for the local low-cost spay/neuter program.

Corley estimates 40 to 50 people attended Big Cats Helping Little Cats, and several bought New Beginnings T-shirts or picked up brochures. Though no cats were adopted on the day, she says she wasn't

too disappointed. "I didn't expect it to be gigantic or anything, but even a handful of people, I consider that successful," she says. The facility's rural, out-of-the-way location may have discouraged some potential visitors, she says.

Corley says she was happy to gain exposure for In-Sync Exotics. "Most of the people who went to the event, the people who knew us, came up to PetSmart afterwards and were just going on and on about how great the facility was, and how much fun it was, and [that] they're going to volunteer there, and they're going to take their nephew there. They thought it was the coolest thing on Earth."

The groups hope to collaborate again in the future and may even make "Big Cats Helping Little Cats" an annual event. Corley—and Reaney, who describes this year's effort as a "last-minute, spur-of-the-moment thing"—have future improvements in mind. They hope to start planning earlier next time, obtain more advance media coverage, and adopt out some cats.

Duval, whose experiences in Texas helped her land a paid position with Wildlife Rehabilitation of Edmonton, sees key characteristics shared by the two organizations that bode well for their future cooperation.

"Both NBCR and In-Sync Exotics have wonderful, dedicated people working hard for the animals they rescue and care for," she says. "Both have volunteers that work hard for animals that have been neglected." **AS**



Canvassing the Nation

Artists collaborate to bring money—and warmth—to shelters

While President Obama may not have ended up adopting a shelter dog, he inspired at least one person to step up to help homeless animals. And the project she started with some artistic friends is one that can benefit shelters and rescues across the country, and even internationally.

“I listened to Obama’s speech when he was elected and felt the urge to reach out to the community,” says Carrie Jacobson, an artist who lives with her photographer husband Peter—and several adopted shelter animals—in Connecticut. “And I realized, I can’t really do very much. I don’t have very many skills that seem useful in terms of strengthening community. All I can do is write and paint.”

At first, she says, those skills didn’t seem like community-builders. “I can’t build a house or put a roof on something. But I was really moved by that sense of wanting to do something useful.”

Her mission became clear through her friendship with Sandy Tajima, another artist who lives all the way across the country in California. They had met through an art blog and struck up a friendship, discovering a shared love of animals.

Jacobson had been a newspaper reporter for many years, and had often covered shelter issues, using her writing to bring attention to the animals who needed homes. Tajima, a former police officer who’d once served as an interim animal control director for nine months during her 26-year career in law enforcement, felt a similar calling.

They tossed around a bunch of ideas before settling on their final project. The site they started, *Art for the Animals* (artforshelteranimals.blogspot.com), is a blog where artists from around the world can come together to share their work, but



PETER JACOBSON

Artist Carrie Jacobson poses with Kaja, a 12-year-old chow-German shepherd mix from a shelter in Westminster, Md., as well as her portrait of the dog. She and her husband, Peter Jacobson, have had Kaja since she was a puppy.

more importantly, use that work to help local animal welfare groups.

The approach is simple: Artists go to their local shelter or rescue and make a portrait of one of the animals there. They then donate the portrait to the group, and the group can use it as it pleases. The artists send photos of their work to the blog so that Jacobson, Tajima—and their friend and fellow artist, the improbably named Sandy Sandy—can publicize the project and pull in more artists. More than 40 artists have participated since the project got started in spring of 2009.

The project is special in its flexibility: Shelters and rescues can use the donated paintings however they choose: They can sell them to raise money. They can offer them as adoption incentives to accompany the animals they depict to their new homes. They can use them to brighten up their own facilities, making the shelter space more

appealing to adopters. They can give them as gifts to special volunteers, or to foster parents who’ve worked with the animal portrayed and are happy—but just a little sad—to see her go to a new home.

Part of the inspiration, says Tajima, came from her own visits to her local shelter with her two kids.

A single mom, Tajima says the family budget is tight. “We do have two cats and a hamster, but we’ve always wanted a dog,” says Tajima. “But we know to be a responsible guardian, you need to have a really healthy budget. But we like to go visit the dogs anyway. And occasionally there’s a dog that’s just so cute, and it’s so frustrating—because the shelter is not like a petting farm where you can buy a treat you can feed the animal, and it’s not like a zoo with a store where you could buy a replica of a crocodile or whatever. My kids feel frustrated when we



DONOVAN SHADLE



CARRIE JACOBSON

Artist Sheila Tajima, right, holds one of the paintings she did for Art for the Animals, a project she helped found that enables artists to donate art to shelters. At left is Kendra Adams of East Bay SPCA in Oakland, Calif., who spearheaded a showcase at her shelter for Art for the Animals paintings.

A shelter in Westerly, R.I., received artist Carrie Jacobson's donation of her portrait of shelter cat Scotty.

leave the shelter empty-handed. So I thought, *What if there were other people out there who have tight budgets but want an animal, but can't bring them home because of some issue—allergies, budget like me, whatever? Why can't they have little art cards of the animals there? Or you can buy a painting of the dog, and your payment buys that dog a nice hammock bed?*"

Well aware of the hectic nature of shelter work and the existing pressures on shelter staff, the organizers have worked to make it easy for animal groups to participate in Art for the Animals. The site provides brochures and handouts artists can customize, and a template for a letter to the editor people can adjust and send to their own local papers to drive up interest.

Providing those things is just common sense, says Jacobson. "I was at the Westerly shelter [in Rhode Island] in a line; there were

eight people ahead of me," says Jacobson. "They were doing everything from getting dog licenses to wanting to see if the shelter had their cat, and I was looking at the two staff who were there working, and was just like 'Good heavens, they can't remember to deal with this, too!'"

While some of the donated paintings have been sold by the shelters and used to raise money for the animals, Jacobson and Tajima say they haven't closely tracked how much money has been raised, since the paintings aren't always used in that manner. They're hoping to track results a bit more closely, though, so they'll know where a painting—and the animal it portrays—ends up.

But Tajima says she can already see the effect of the project on the artists who have participated. "I had one artist who said, 'I never wanted to go into a shelter, because I was afraid of what I was going to see there, but I wanted to try this project anyway.' She went in, and she was overwhelmed! She was treated like a queen, given the grand tour, the shelter staff were introducing her as 'the artist,'" Tajima laughs. "She went on and on about what a wonderful experience it was, because her image before then had been that dismal, dark, *Lady and the Tramp* image."

It's an image that Art for the Animals is reshaping, one lovely painting at a time. [AS](#)

Tune Your Skills in Music City

Looking to get in tune with your profession? Hoping to sharpen your edge?

Then The Humane Society of the United States' Animal Care Expo 2010—set for May 12-15 at the Gaylord Opryland Resort and Convention Center in Nashville, Tenn.—is the place for you.

The annual event attracts thousands of animal sheltering and emergency response professionals seeking to improve their skills through workshops, explore the latest products and services in the Exhibit Hall trade show, and reinvigorate themselves by networking with their peers.

A new series this year—Expo Edge—will feature hour-long workshops focusing on new trends, research, and emerging issues in animal sheltering. The topics will include the Shelter Pet Project, coalition building, lifetime care for pets, new spay/neuter research, and getting the most out of your Expo experience.

A new workshop track this year will be devoted to equine protection. Other tracks will address building humane communities, pets at risk, executive leadership, field services, fundraising, shelter medicine, shelter services, and emergency services.

For more information, including the registration guide and workshop descriptions, go to animalsheltering.org/expo.



Running on Sunshine

A socially conscious teenager helps a Colorado shelter go solar



LENA MICHELS

Dustin Michels of Boulder, Colo., undertook a unique community service project for his bar mitzvah: arranging to have solar photovoltaic panels installed on the roof of the Humane Society of Boulder Valley. His project will save the shelter thousands of dollars a year on its electric bill.

In 2008, Dustin Michels was struggling to balance two passions: helping animals and protecting the environment. His bar mitzvah was coming up, and the Boulder, Colo., middle-schooler was mulling over what kind of community service he wanted to perform to mark his coming of age in the Jewish religion.

He knew one thing: He wanted to do something big.

In the end, Dustin didn't have to choose between the two causes. An enthusiastic environmentalist, Dustin is particularly interested in the benefits of solar energy—his family had just installed solar photovoltaic panels on their roof, and he was immediately intrigued by the concept. He realized that he could help animals and protect the environment by getting a solar panel system donated to the local animal shelter, the Humane Society of Boulder Valley.

Solar power would mean less energy from the grid, lower utility bills for the shelter, and more money for the animals. "I chose the humane society because it's a cool place, a good cause, and good people," says Dustin.

In the summer of 2008, Dustin asked Namaste Solar, the company that had installed the panels at his house, whether it would be interested in funding his project. Namaste steered him to its matching grant program. If he could raise half the money for the installation, the company would donate the other half.

Dustin arranged to present his proposal to Lisa Pedersen, CEO of the humane society.

It wasn't just any presentation. It was a slick PowerPoint number that Dustin had designed and produced himself. "It was phenomenal," says Pedersen. "He went through what the investment would be, how many years it would take to get the money back, why it was good for the environment. I was very impressed with his knowledge."

But even with the grant from Namaste, there was still a \$12,000 gap to be filled—and the shelter just couldn't divert such a big chunk of its operating funds to the project. "Lisa thought solar energy was great, but really expensive, and she didn't want it to get in the way of the money they needed for animal care," says Dustin. "And I didn't want it to get in the way, either. That defeats the purpose."

It didn't defeat Dustin, though, who assured Pedersen that he would raise the money.

Enter the Center for ReSource Conservation (CRC), a Boulder organization that provides education and services to empower the community to conserve natural resources. An anonymous donor wanted to fund a solar energy project, so CRC contacted Heather Leanne Nangle, co-owner and director of marketing and community relations for Namaste, to ask for her recommendation. Dustin was at the top of the list.

The shelter unveiled its new solar awning in May 2009. Pedersen estimates it will save between \$1,000 and \$3,000 a year on the utility bill, money that will go directly to

the animals. Cost to the shelter: \$0. "This was a great partnership," she says. "And a great example of what one person can do. Dustin absolutely inspired so many of our constituents."

Dustin plays guitar, and he says he sees himself down the road putting a band together, cutting records, and touring. Or he may make a career in technology or science, working on something "that would change the world." He's not done giving, though. He plans to volunteer at the humane society as part of a community service unit at his school.

At his bar mitzvah, Pedersen says, Dustin spoke about how much the project has done for him and how it had enriched his spiritual journey. "He is a remarkable young man, and we're very honored that he chose us," she says. "This is a kid who's going to make stuff happen." **AS**

MOUTHPIECES)))))))



The Mouthpieces department is designed to help you communicate your messages to the public. Just add

your organization's contact information and hang it up in your lobby or hand it out, as appropriate. You don't need to tear out the page: Go to animalsheltering.org/mouthpieces to download and print a clean PDF copy.

Send suggestions for future Mouthpieces to asm@humanesociety.org.





Saved from Slaughter

A Yonkers family and Farm Sanctuary shepherd a lamb to safety

Talk about the warm fuzzies.

Last September, Cindy Rexhaj, her mother, Sonija Hadzovic, and Rexhaj's two children—Adriana, 4, and Leila, 2—were browsing at an Italian produce market in the Bronx when they spotted a livestock truck unloading sheep at a slaughterhouse a few storefronts away.

Wanting to get a closer look at the animals, the foursome walked down the street, and Rexhaj peered inside the truck. There she saw two newborn lambs. One hadn't survived the trip, but the other was still alive.

Rexhaj alerted the driver, asking him to pull the lamb out of the truck. When it became clear there was no way to know which ewe he belonged to, dashing any hopes of reuniting the pair, Rexhaj asked what would become of him. "Some of them survive, some of them don't survive," the driver told her. No slaughterhouse would expend the time or money to nurse and raise a lamb.

So Rexhaj begged the man to give her the animal, saying she and her mother—who grew up on a farm in her native Albania—would take care of him. Finally, he gave in.

They wrapped the lamb in a blanket, put him in their car, placed him on Adriana's lap—the seat belt around both of them—and drove to nearby Yonkers, N.Y., where Hadzovic lives in a house with a big backyard. "I didn't even think about it until we brought him home. I was like, 'That's it, let's go, we're out of there.' We grabbed him, and we left," Rexhaj says.

They'd saved the lamb from death. Now what?

They wiped him down with a wet cloth and baby shampoo, and then put him in one of Leila's baby diapers so he could run around the house—which he did, following Hadzovic everywhere. They bottle-fed him diluted baby formula. And they gave him a name: Bootsy. (Rexhaj says the word means "cutie" in Albanian.)

After five wild and woolly days of the lamb's antics, it came time to find him a permanent home. Rexhaj called the Bronx Zoo,

the Queens Zoo, various farms, and an apple orchard with a petting zoo. No luck.

But one woman she spoke to suggested she contact Farm Sanctuary, located in Watkins Glen, N.Y., about four hours north-west of New York City. Rexhaj called the organization and spoke to placement specialist Melissa Woodruff, who said a volunteer who lives in the area could come by to pick up the lamb that same day.

Bootsy arrived at the farm, his health was evaluated, and he was given a new name: Angelo.

Susie Coston, national shelter director for Farm Sanctuary, gives high marks to Rexhaj and her mother for the obvious love and care they gave him. "He was in fantastic shape. It speaks really highly of his human mother, who took him in and knew exactly what to do with him," she says.

Once they found out they would be getting a lamb, Farm Sanctuary staff started calling every adopter who had ever taken a lamb from the organization. (All adopters have to be vegetarian or vegan and promise to keep adoptees as companion animals.)

They came up with Robert and Leslie Nason, of Williamston, Mich., who have been adopting lambs and turkeys from the group since 1991. They said they'd be happy to add Angelo—along with another lamb and two turkeys—to their 40-acre farm. In early November, Woodruff drove all the animals from New York to Michigan.

The Nasons gave the lamb a new—and likely final—name: William Shakespeare. They've named all their sheep after British writers, so he joins ewes Virginia Woolf, Beatrix Potter, and Charlotte Bronte; their other new lamb is Daniel Defoe.

Thus Bootsy-Angelo-William Shakespeare survived his harrowing beginnings, and began a new life of peaceful grazing and cavorting with his adopted kin.

His rescuers will never forget him—especially the two little girls.

"We have pictures, we talk about him," Rexhaj says. "I put a video of him from Farm Sanctuary on my computer, and my daughter



Cindy Rexhaj (center, holding daughter Adriana, 4) rescued a newborn lamb from a Bronx, N.Y., slaughterhouse near an Italian market where she and her family were shopping. Pictured are: Rexhaj; Adriana Rexhaj; Leila Rexhaj, 2; and Rexhaj's mother, Sonija Hadzovic.



After being born in transit to a Bronx slaughterhouse, Bootsy the lamb found refuge—and a new name, Angelo—at Farm Sanctuary in Watkins Glen, N.Y. He was later given a permanent home (and yet another name) at a farm owned by vegetarians in Williamston, Mich.

was like, 'Bootsy! Mom, when are we going to see him?' And I'm like, 'We will see him. One day we definitely will take a road trip, just to go see him.'" 

[scoop]

Help Them While They're Young

Fighting juvenile animal cruelty in Phoenix

BY DEBRA J. WHITE

A 9-year old boy appears in family court, accused of dousing a cat with gasoline and setting her on fire. Already in foster care, he's too young to incarcerate, but he's inflicted pain and suffering on a sentient being. What are the judge's options?

In most parts of the country, very few. A judge may refer the child for counseling, but if no other criminal charges are pending, the child is usually released to the custody of his family or guardians—and if they don't seek counseling for him, he's unlikely to get it.

Childhood animal cruelty is troublesome. Social workers and psychologists recognize it's a likely indication of later violence. Prominent researchers like Frank Ascione, Randall Lockwood, and Phil Arkow have

violent behavior in juveniles. Risley-Curtiss, an associate professor at the Arizona State University School of Social Work, recently founded the Children and Animals Together (CAT) assessment and diversion program. Based in Phoenix, CAT is designed to provide structured intervention in the lives of children who've committed acts of animal cruelty, helping treat and prevent both the behavior and its underlying causes.

Two years ago, Dorothy Thompson, a Maricopa County juvenile probation officer, contacted Risley-Curtiss about two boys who had killed a cat. The kids were mandated to attend a diversion program, and the officer asked Risley-Curtiss where to go—and she had nothing to suggest.

It might have ended right there, but for Risley-Curtiss, it presented a challenge. "No treatment program existed, so that was our opportunity to develop one," she says.

With help from other experts in child and animal welfare—humane education director Kris Haley and supervisor Andy Starr of the Arizona Humane Society; Pam Gaber, president and founder of the animal-assisted therapy group Gabriel's Angels; and the county probation department—Risley-Curtiss put together a one-day pilot program designed to be an empathetic learning experience for the boys involved. The first sessions were held at the Arizona Humane Society in 2008.

Thompson, the juvenile probation officer who handled the case, believes the boys benefitted greatly. "I could have easily given them a standard diversion consequence, such as community service at a food bank or writing an apology letter," she says. "However, my goal was to find something meaningful for the boys to learn to prevent any further harm to animals." That, she thinks, was accomplished through the CAT program.

Encouraged by the success, the team went on to make the program official, expanding on the activities of the first session. The program is voluntary and free of charge, and includes assessment, intervention, consultation, referral, and follow-up for children ages 6-17 who have a history of animal abuse.

In June 2009, CAT accepted its first clients, all boys. That mirrors the national statistics on childhood animal abusers, most of whom are male. The program, now based at the Arizona Animal Welfare League, consists of three three-hour sessions on three consecutive weekends.

Family participation is now required, says Risley-Curtiss. Initially, some families weren't always reinforcing the messages their kids were getting through the program, Risley-Curtiss says, and sometimes, the families have work to do as well.

"We have a 4-year-old who has killed two puppies," she says, "one when she was 2 and one just recently." The girl is too young for their program—though she will be assessed—but Risley-Curtiss thinks there are obviously supervision issues, too. "We are going to try to find out about why [she did it], but the other question is why was she left alone with the puppy?" she asks.

Working with the families is a challenge in itself. Most of the children referred to the program are Hispanic, and in some cases, the children speak English but their parents don't. While the CAT team has enlisted the help of a translator, "every case that we have is complicated by socioeconomic issues, everything is complicated by class issues, and cultural issues," Risley-Curtiss says.

Participants in the CAT program include a treatment team of social workers, a humane educator, a therapy animal, and a handler from Gabriel's Angels, an animal-assisted therapy group devoted to freeing children from the cycle of violence. Exercises and homework projects teach empathy and compassion. Under supervision, children get to meet and interact with a variety of shelter animals.



The Children and Animals Together (CAT) assessment and diversion program requires family participation. This helps ensure the reinforcement of the messages children hear in the program, and highlights the need for adult supervision when young children are around animals.

found a strong link between animal abuse and human violence. Serial killers Jeffrey Dahmer, Ted Bundy, and Patrick Sherrill all had a history of animal abuse. Is it possible their murderous rampages could have been averted if they'd received treatment when they were younger?

Christina Risley-Curtiss, Ph. D., believes that early intervention may be key to stopping

The Right Way to Transport

The National Federation of Humane Societies weighs in

They also work on recognizing and describing emotions. “We’re doing more on faces,” Risley-Curtiss says. The team will show the children pictures of people and ask them to describe what the person is feeling based on their body language. “We have them show us ‘What does it feel like to be mad? What about sad, or hurt?’” Risley-Curtiss explains. “And then connecting that to an animal—‘How would it feel to have your tail pulled or be hit?’ We work on having them identify their own feelings and be able to recognize [those of] others.”

The animal-assisted therapy team even brings a stethoscope, Risley-Curtiss says, which allows the children to listen to an animal’s heartbeat. “We talk about how we both have hearts, so they listen to their own heartbeat and the animals’ heartbeats, and that’s part of talking about the needs we share.”

Gaber, who serves on CAT’s executive committee and the CAT treatment team, says she was honored to be asked to be part the program. “CAT is one of the few intervention programs in the nation for young cruelty offenders,” she says. “It is so important to stop, treat, and prevent childhood animal cruelty.”

Creating the program from scratch has been a challenge, but it’s also been exciting, Risley-Curtiss says. It’s way too early to study outcomes, but Risley-Curtiss suggests that if these kids have positive experiences helping and caring for animals, it will help build empathy and reduce the cycle of violence.

CAT is privately funded through the Kenneth A. Scott Charitable Trust, a KeyBank Trust, and has received a supporting grant from the Animal Welfare Trust. In addition, several volunteers help support the program.

For more information, contact Risley-Curtiss at risley.curtiss@asu.edu. 



Done properly, animal transport programs can be an effective tool for reducing the euthanasia of healthy, adoptable pets. But the process can be complex, and there are practical and ethical considerations to take into account before launching a transfer program.

In order to help groups around the country achieve more uniform standards, the National Federation of Humane Societies (NFHS) recently released protocols that explore the best practices for transfer programs.

The NFHS spent most of 2009 developing the new protocols after it identified several issues that could impact the ability of shelters and rescue groups to transfer animals. For example, many state veterinarians are concerned about animals being moved across state borders without proper health certificates and required vaccinations; local authorities are worried about unscreened animals who may pose a public health or safety risk entering their jurisdictions; several states are proposing licensing programs for all organizations transferring animals, as a means of regulating the practice; and some jurisdictions have even talked about regulation to stop transfers altogether.

Among the group’s key recommendations for high-quality transfer programs:



- Adopt a three-tiered approach, beginning with the most basic requirements and expanding to include additional requirements as resources of the partners allow;
- Ensure full compliance with local and state regulations;
- Put animal health and care as the primary focus;
- Work jointly to solve the community issues leading to pet overpopulation—by, for example, establishing a spay/neuter program so that the community with surplus puppies won’t always be in that position.

“If we don’t self-regulate, we could end up losing the ability to transfer animals, which would be a big loss for the sheltering community,” says Steve Putnam, executive director of the NFHS. “So we need to do it, and do it well, and do it within the regulations that are out there.”

“Companion Animal Transport Programs—Best Practices” can be viewed at the organization’s website, humane federation.org. 



Get out your handkerchiefs! Dogs Deserve Better is a nationwide group that devotes itself to rescuing dogs from life on the end of a chain, where they often fail to receive even minimal care and are denied the warmth of a family. Forty real-life rescue stories have been compiled by founder **Tamira Ci Thayne** and Illinois representative **Dawn Ashby** in *Unchain My Heart: Dogs Deserve Better Rescue Stories of Courage, Compassion, and Caring*, a volume of heartbreak and happiness that will have you buying stock in Kleenex. Members battle bad weather, irate owners, and the long arm of the law to liberate dogs such as Mischa, who



was released from a junkyard and went on to foil two bank robberies, and Doogie, a sick, old German shepherd mix who could no longer stand. He lived only 5 1/2 months longer, but it was in a loving home for the first and only time in his life. Most of the stories end on

a much better note, and the fortitude of both rescuers and rescued could make a stone weep. The book can be purchased for \$14.97 plus shipping and handling at the group's website, dogsdeservebetter.com.

Weaseling out of paying. You know times are tough when people start making off with mustelids. That's what a man in Jacksonville Beach, Fla., did in November. WJXT-TV reported that **Rodney Bolton**, of no fixed address, slipped a ferret into his pants and left a local pet store without paying, unaware that a 17-year-old customer had witnessed the crime.



The teenage boy followed Bolton out and confronted him. A struggle ensued, during which the thief held the ferret up to the boy's face and squeezed it, causing the agitated animal to bite the boy's ear. Police arrested Bolton and charged him with shoplifting and battery for **wielding the ferret as a dangerous weapon**. The ferret was returned unharmed to the pet store. Bolton is not the first to attempt a ferret filching: A nearly identical case occurred a month earlier in Beckley, W.Va., where, according to the *Beckley Register-Herald*, a man stole a ferret from a pet store by ... stuffing it in his pants and running. We think the ferrets should have pressed sexual assault charges.

Sorry, wrong number. A case of mistaken identity recently left an animal sanctuary in Texas \$5,000 richer. In September, **Dawn Rizos of Dallas** was extremely flattered when she was named Entrepreneur of the Year by American Solutions for Winning the Future (ASWF), a conservative political group headed by **former House speaker Newt Gingrich**. The group lauded her success in building her business and recognized "the risks you take to create jobs and stimulate the economy," according to the pet blog Ohmidog.com. The letter also informed her that for a \$5,000 donation, Rizos could have dinner with Gingrich in Washington, D.C. She jumped at the chance, immediately sending a check and booking

plane and hotel reservations. But it was not to be. ASWF sent Rizos an "oops, our bad" letter, telling her that it had confused her company (doing business as DCG Inc.) with another by the same name. Her business, The Lodge, is stimulating in its own way—it's an adult-entertainment club. When ASWF realized its mistake, it essentially said, "We're returning your money, and could we have our award back?" Amused, Rizos complied. The club owner donated the \$5,000 to Animal Guardians of America, a sanctuary outside Dallas, to help build a shelter for pit bulls. It will be called **Newt's Nook—A Home for Pit Bulls**, to honor the man who made it all happen.

LEEDing by example. It's not easy being green, sings Kermit the Frog, but the **Potter League for Animals** in Middletown, R.I., is up to the task. In October, the



U.S. Green Building Council bestowed a Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) gold award—its second-highest distinction—on the new facility, honoring the league for meeting at least 60 percent of the council's criteria for environmentally friendly construction. The only animal shelter in the country to receive the award, the building, designed by

ARQ Architects, incorporates a roof garden, recycled building materials, natural lighting, a gravel parking lot to absorb water runoff, and a 15,000-gallon cistern to hold and treat runoff for reuse in cage cleaning and toilet flushing. And animal-friendly features help make the shelter a healthier and more comfortable environment for the critters, reports the *Providence Journal*—the facility has a hospital-grade air exchange system that has reduced URI in cats to the point where the league is no longer eligible to participate in a research study of the problem. Dogs and cats stay in glassed-in, soundproof communal living rooms rather than standard cages, which prevents isolation and boredom as well as noise and odor in the shelter. E-mail

path@potterleague.org to request a copy of the league's brochure on building green; you can also take a photo tour of the shelter at potterleague.org.

■ **Serving time serving.** When **Osceola Animal Control** in St. Cloud, Fla., laid off 12 of its 31 staff members in August because of budget cuts, it faced the very real possibility of closing its doors. But *Zootoo News* reports that the shelter is being kept open partly by an influx of labor from an unexpected source—inmates. Usually seen collecting roadside litter, prisoners from the county jail are now picking up puppy poop and cleaning kitten cages. Participants are nonviolent offenders who get five days shaved off their sentences for every 30 days they work in the shelter. **Joyce Peach**, the shelter's director, is delighted with the program. Visits from the public have increased, and "we get a lot of compliments on how clean the shelter is," says Peach. "The dogs are much more socialized because the inmates get them out and exercise and play with them." County officials estimate that the program is saving \$100,000 a year and plan to make it permanent. This year Peach would like to establish a formal training program that would give the inmates certification in various aspects of shelter work and better prospects for employment. (For more on shelter programs that get help from inmates, see the *Animal Sheltering* feature, "Inside, Looking Out" in the Jan-Feb '10 issue).

■ **Shape up or ship out.** Following a fatal pit bull attack on a child at Camp Lejeune, N.C., in 2008 and several other injuries to people and dogs, the Marine Corps moved to prohibit owners from keeping the breed—as well as Rottweilers, wolf hybrids, and mixes of those breeds—in base housing, forcing owners to give up beloved pets. Fortunately, the Corps left an "out" in the regulations: If a dog could pass a nationally recognized temperament

test, the owner could apply for a waiver that would allow the dog to remain on base through December 2011. Noncompliance meant eviction for both dog and family, according to the *Marine Corps Times*. On Oct. 6, a team of animal behaviorists arrived in Beaufort, S.C., to evaluate more than 80 dogs at Parris Island, the famed Marine training



base. Led by Emily Weiss, ASPCA senior director of shelter research and development and a certified behaviorist, the team tested 85 dogs using the ASPCA Safety Assessment for Evaluation Rehoming (SAFER) and found only two who showed enough aggressive tendencies to be removed from base housing. Two others needed help; one will work with a trainer, and the other will be neutered. **AS**

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Tell us about a time when you were about to lose your cool with a member of the public. How did you manage to calm down and handle the situation politely?

That was the question we asked you for this issue's Coffee Break, and you sent us plenty of creative examples of how you maintained your professionalism in the face of trying circumstances. For more of your responses, go to animalsheltering.org/coffeebreak.



A mother and grandfather came in with three rambunctious, out-of-control kids to adopt a dog because the mother was told it would help calm the children. No one in this family seemed to have the skills or patience needed to handle any pet. After 10 minutes of out-of-control behavior, we were furious at the adults for allowing the kids to run rampant through the adoption lobby and less than happy with the kids. We were to the point of asking them to leave when I decided to instead take each child individually by the hand and one by one take them on a five-minute private tour. We sat on the floor of the kitten room and with our "quiet voice" invited kittens to crawl into our laps to be petted. Turns out these children had never touched a cat or dog and were just overwhelmed at the mere presence of them. I gave each the homework assignment of practicing the quiet voice and gentle touch on a stuffed toy at home and invited Mom to come back when she thought they were ready to accept the notion of gentleness and respect for their future adopted pet. The family did come back three months later, eager to show off the positive results of their newly practiced skills, and left with a 6-month-old kitten.

—Kathy Gumph, Adoption Counselor
Humane Society Naples
Naples, Florida

I find that the best way to keep my cool during times when I'm dealing with someone that is really aggravating me is to use "reframing." This involves mentally viewing the situation from a different perspective so that it can be seen in a healthier, more positive light (and thus be easier to deal with). A good example is animal turn-ins. It's pretty aggravating to have someone surrendering a perfectly good animal just because they don't want to deal with it anymore. But I don't get angry with them. (By the way, no matter how much you try to hide anger, it always comes through ... this just makes them defensive and angry back at you.) Instead, I try to reframe the situation by seeing this as an opportunity to rescue this animal from these regrettably ignorant owners and find it a home with someone who can truly meet its needs.

—Steve Kinne, Dog Adoption Counselor
Wanderers' Rest
Canastota, New York

Dogs and cats come in all the time in terrible shape. My first reaction was to get angry. I took a step back and realized my bottom line is I'm here for the animals, not the people. When I was handed a small dog that had what looked like months of dried feces stuck to his back and legs and [he was] crying in pain, I safely and slowly cleaned him up and told the owner very calmly that if he did not want the dog anymore or did not have the time for him that I would love to have him. Two days later the owner brought the dog to me. He now lives with owners that absolutely love him. All's well that ends well.

—Nancy Lancaster, Groomer/Owner
The Rainbow Co.
Smithville, Texas

I work in customer service at a pet adoption facility. Potential adopters are required to complete an application form, followed by a consultation. One day I was confronted by a family who was interested in adopting kittens that were not available. I explained that the animals become available only when they have seen a veterinarian to get spayed/neutered, [undergo a] general health checkup, and [have] their temperament evaluated by the kennel staff. I also explained to the potential adopter that we require a consultation, and the application would need to be approved. I also informed her of the adoption fee. The potential adopter became very obnoxious about the process involved in adopting an animal from our facility. She expected to walk in the facility and come out with the animals of her choice in a short period of time without completing an application, [having a] consultation, or paying the adoption fee. I calmly reiterated our policy and adoption process and what is included in the adoption fee. She was too preoccupied spilling words of contention without giving me an opportunity to speak. I felt myself losing my temper, and before I reached the point of getting enraged by her contentious attitude, I excused myself and walked back to the kennel to speak to a front office staff and have her take over for me. I knew that if I continued to be in the potential adopter's presence, I would reach my "boiling point," and the outcome will definitely be ugly.

—Helen Karganilla,
Customer Service Manager
Sequoia Humane Society
Eureka, California

Honestly, we had a man bring in his dog because "it loved him too much." After the relinquishment paperwork was completed, the animal behaviorist and I were shocked when he asked if we had any dogs he could look at for adoption. Instead of getting angry and scolding him, we very nicely told him yes, but they would all love him just as much (if not more), as they had been abandoned and probably needed more love.

—Tanya Morris, Front Desk Supervisor
Roanoke Valley SPCA
Roanoke, Virginia

Animal control presented us with a gentle, pregnant pit bull one afternoon. Placing her in a kennel with food and blankets, we left, returning the next morning to find a tired new mother of eight. Days passed; no one claimed her. A rescue group spoke up for "Madonna" and her family, just as a cocky guy swaggered in with his girlfriend, long past the stray-hold date, demanding his dog. Our receptionist politely handled his machismo, smiling, nodding, and directing him to the sheriff's department next door. Waiting, the girlfriend admitted she was jealous of the dog, gave it away while the boyfriend was gone, and asked if they could keep one puppy. Our director never flinched, but smiled and said they were all on their way to rescue. Returning from the sheriff's department, the once-owner signed Madonna over to the shelter and left with the girlfriend. We all agreed—luckily, he chose the wrong girl.

—Maggie Tatum, Vice President
Elk Country Animal Shelter
Atlanta, Michigan

I get many calls from people planning on breeding one of their pets, but also wanting to adopt one of my rescues. So how do I manage to stay calm and polite when dealing with that? I stop, take a deep breath, and focus on the fact that they are still uneducated about the situation in its entirety. I wrap my hands around my coffee cup (because that keeps my hands busy and always makes me feel a bit better) and I try to remember that this person will tell others about their experience, so I want it to be a good one. I need people to love this rescue and what we do, so everything I say and do must be done politely and kindly, never rudely. Even if I do not adopt a dog to them, I still need them to have a good experience with our organization.

—Melissa Dory, Founder
Wyoming Rat Terriers Rescue
Lusk, Wyoming

Animal Sheltering congratulates Helen Karganilla of Sequoia Humane Society, whose submission was selected in a random drawing from those published in this issue. Sequoia Humane Society will receive a free coffee break: a \$50 gift certificate to a local coffee shop. "Bone" appetit!

**Next question:
Has there been a point when you decided to stop working in the animal sheltering and rescue field? Why? What brought you back?**

Please submit your responses (150 words or less) at animalsheltering.org/coffeebreak or send them to Editor, *Animal Sheltering/HSUS*, 2100 L St. NW, Washington, DC 20037. **Your answer may be printed in a future issue of *Animal Sheltering*.** If your response is chosen for publication, you will be entered into a drawing to win a **free coffee break (valued at \$50)** for your organization. Responses may be edited for length or clarity; no donation or purchase is necessary to win. See animalsheltering.org for contest rules, or send an e-mail or letter to the above addresses to request a printed copy.