

Help Prevent Tragedies

The Pet Fund pays for urgent vet care for those who can't afford it.

BY NANCY KERNS

We hear about a lot of amazing people who are doing great deeds for and with dogs – people involved with rescuing and fostering dogs, search and rescue, training service or therapy dogs, etc. We also know that dog lovers are asked, frequently, to donate money to these and many other animal-oriented good causes. But because our primary mission is to provide our readers with information they can use to benefit their *own* dogs, we don't often highlight these admirable canine-oriented social services in the pages of WDJ.

We're making an exception for the Pet Fund, largely because it's possible (but we hope it doesn't happen) that the organization *could* provide you or someone you know with a lifesaving service someday.

Saving lives

In its simplest description, the Pet Fund pays for urgent veterinary care for pet owners who cannot afford it.

The people behind the Pet Fund deplore the fact that dogs (and other pets) are sometimes euthanized, relinquished to shelters, or suffer without medical care because their owners cannot afford expensive surgery or emergency vet visits. Pet insurance programs are available, but often even these programs cannot cover the total cost of necessary medical care. The Pet Fund can, for a limited number of qualified owners, step in and make a huge difference, sometimes, with only a modest grant.

Here's how it works. Either a participating veterinarian or an individual contacts the Pet Fund. The veterinarian consults with Pet Fund a staff member regarding his diagnosis, prognosis, and recommended treatment of the animal needing assistance. Depending on the level of funding available and the urgency of the needed treatment, the Pet Fund staff decides based on several factors whether or not to fund the animal's care.

The decision is based on the stated financial need of the owner, the opinion of

the treating vet as to the medical necessity and urgency of the treatment needed, and the demonstrated capability of the animal owners to be responsible for their animals.

According to Karen Leslie, Executive Director of the Pet Fund, "The owner's responsibility is crucial, since we will not fund treatment for animals whose owners do not seem to be able to care for the animals' basic needs now or in the future. One of the greatest benefits of the Pet Fund is keeping animals out of shelters, so giving funds to irresponsible owners would not accomplish this goal. There is a significant difference between pet owners who are responsible but have incurred financial difficulties and irresponsible owners who view their animal as objects and an unnecessary expense."

If the funding needed for a particular course of treatment is available, if after the consultation with the veterinarian funding is approved, our staff informs the veterinarian of the level of funding which has been granted. (Funds are only dispersed to treating veterinarians, never to individuals.)

The most urgent cases are funded first, with other less urgent requests put on a waiting list for available funding.

The people behind the Pet Fund are clear that its intent is *not* to grant funds for any "heroic" lifesaving measures which would cause unnecessary suffering to animals, nor to fund basic medical care, such as vaccinations, spay and neuter surgeries, or routine veterinary care. "We feel it is the responsibility of all pet owners to budget for these expenses," says Leslie. "The Pet Fund can best serve in urgent situations where serious medical treatment is needed beyond routine care."

Other goals

Recognizing that preventive care could help many pet owners avoid many future medical problems for their companion animals, the Pet Fund provides information about

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WHAT YOU CAN DO . . .

- Investigate whether you or someone you know could benefit from the Pet Fund. See thepetfund.com or call (916) 443-6007.
- Donate to the Pet Fund, at 510 19th Street, Sacramento, CA 95814. Encourage your favorite pet products company to donate, too.

available products, services, and healthy pet practices on its Web site. Information about pet insurance plans *and* financial services (such as savings plans and debt counseling agencies) is also made available to interested pet owners.

"If we do not provide a way for the pet owner to develop financial freedom, we have not totally remedied the situation or accomplished our goal," says Leslie. "It's a large part of our objective to ensure that our clients provide a more secure future for their

companion animals by developing their resources in order to become independent and stable. The Pet Fund therefore truly benefits both animals and people."

At this point, most of the Pet Fund's grants fall into the \$500 range, making up the difference between the cost of an animal's treatment and what each client is able to pay. The grants have provided assistance to hundreds of companion animal owners; we think helping the Pet Fund reach its goal of helping *thousands* of animals is a *great* idea. 🐾

