

Homeless Dogs Get a Lift From Virgin America

The airline gives free flights to transport Chihuahuas from California to New York.

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A group of 25 small dogs got new lives last month when “Grey’s Anatomy” actress Katherine Heigl helped launch “Project Flying Chihuahua,” paying to fly the homeless dogs from Los Angeles to New Hampshire shelters.

Now Virgin America has followed the actress’s lead, giving free flights to 15 Chihuahuas from a San Francisco shelter to New York City.

The operation is part of a broader effort to ease California’s overpopulation of unwanted Chihuahuas, which are said to make up some 30 percent of all homeless pets in the state.

“We’ve never been able to really satisfy the demand for small dogs here in New York City and the Northeast,” said Gail Buchwald, senior vice president of the ASPCA adoption center in New York, to The Associated Press. Transporting the dogs from coast to coast has always been the biggest obstacle, she says.

The Chihuahuas got first-class treatment from Virgin America, including a red-carpet departure from San Francisco and a chance to ride in carriers in the plane’s regular passenger cabin. The flight also offered a champagne cocktail – “Chi-mosas” – and cupcakes for the human passengers, as well as doggie treats and toys for the Chihuahuas.