

Pet Stores to Host Homeless Dog Food Drive

People can drop off food donations at participating stores to be delivered to homeless or low-income families with dogs.

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Credit: Tim Hulsizer Feeding Pets of the Homeless program, which matches consumer donations of cat and dog food with local food banks, is now open to pet stores, grooming services, and other pet-related businesses with a retail component.

Launched in December 2006, by Genevieve Frederick, president of Paw Publishing, the company signed up nine veterinary clinics within the first six months, and a pet groomer recently joined, too.

As part of the program, store owners or veterinarians are provided with materials to publicize the food drive, such as sample fliers, press releases and media contacts in their neighborhoods. Pet owners drop off donations at the participating company, and then the local shelter or other service picks up the food to deliver to homeless or otherwise disadvantaged people with pets, such as seniors or low-income residents.

National Coalition for the Homeless statistics estimate that between five to 10 percent of homeless people have dogs and/or cats.

"Once they get on the street and have a pet, it's very hard for them to let go of their pet," she said. "Pets are loyal. In many instances, these pets have a chance to run away from the situation, but they don't."

Sometimes people might even decline a roof over their head, because they can't find a low-income option or a shelter that will allow them to bring their pet along, too, says Frederick.

Having a dog or cat can also provide a homeless person with a sense of normalcy and create a positive feeling just by being needed by another living creature, she added. "Not only are we helping the pets, but we're also helping the people that are their guardians."

Her local veterinarian recently donated three 55-gallon tubs of pet food to the area food bank as part of the program.

Previously open only to veterinarians, Frederick says she decided to expand the program after receiving numerous calls from the general public as well as pet-related businesses interested in becoming involved.

"The goal is to have this be a nationwide program so that pets that are on the street with the homeless are at least being fed nutritious food," she said.

It's a step-by-step program, all administrable through the website, www.petsofhomeless.com, said Frederick.