

The Pet Fund. . . helping animal guardians in need

by Karen Leslie

Twelve-year-old Rebecca's voice trembled as she poured out her story over the phone. Her Labrador needed surgery for bladder stones, but because her family couldn't afford to pay for the operation, they were faced with having to take their much-loved dog to a shelter, where he would likely be euthanized. Not only was this a life or death situation for the dog, but it would also be a devastating loss for Rebecca and her family.

It's not an uncommon scenario. Because of financial problems caused by job loss, illness or injury, many people in Rebecca's position must often make the difficult decision to have an animal euthanized or neglect important veterinary needs because of the cost of surgery or emergency vet visits. Millions of these animals end up being surrendered to shelters for medical reasons that range from heartworm and parvovirus to fractures, arthritis, pancreatitis, feline urinary tract disease, and diabetes. Shelters frequently have no option but to euthanize the animals, since their own budgets are limited at best and are generally reserved for younger animals that are considered more adoptable.

A helping hand

Happily for Rebecca, an Internet search led her to The Pet Fund, a national non-profit organization that provides financial assistance to animal guardians who can't afford veterinary care. She called for help, and as a result, her beloved Lab was able to get the surgery he needed, and to remain with his human family. While most of The Pet Fund's callers are older than Rebecca, their needs are the same – they have a cherished animal in need of urgent medical care, but no way to pay the vet bills.

The Pet Fund is working towards a future where decisions about veterinary care need never be made on the basis of cost. The organization also educates people on how to avoid future medical and financial crises – and that is where it hopes to make the

Top left: Dr. Linda Wallace of The Pet Fund examines Rusty the cat. *Right:* After encountering unexpected medical expenses for Mischa, Karen Leslie decided to start The Pet Fund to help others in similar circumstances.



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most impact. The Pet Fund helps each applicant develop his or her resources in order to become financially independent and educated about preventative care. It also links people to resources about savings plans, debt counseling agencies, pet insurance, and other valuable financial services. This information enables people to establish financial resources on their own and to avoid future emergencies through care and planning.

Who's eligible for assistance?

The application process starts either with a veterinarian referral, or with individuals who contact The Pet Fund directly. At that point, the participating veterinarian consults with staff regarding diagnosis, prognosis, and recommended treatment of the animal needing assistance. The most urgent cases are funded first, with other requests put on a waiting list for available funding.

The "triage" system for deciding which cases to fund is based on the financial need of the animal guardian, the opinion of the treating veterinarian as to the medical necessity and urgency of the treatment needed, and the capability of the guardians to be responsible for their animals. This last consideration is crucial, since there is a significant difference between people who are responsible but suffering financial difficulties, and those who view their animal as an unnecessary expense. It's important to realize that it's not always the latter who drop their animals off at a shelter – often it is the caring guardian who feels they have no other choice. It is these people that The Pet Fund can work with and help.


The Pet Fund is supported by private, corporate, and foundation donations. Each donation dramatically increases the number of animals the organization is able to help, and also improves its ability to promote its services and extend its help to additional communities. The Pet Fund's mission – alleviating animal suffering, educating animal guardians about preventative

care, and improving the economic stability of guardians and their communities – depends on this support from caring groups and individuals. Thanks to them, stories like Rebecca's can be given a happy ending.

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THE PET FUND, VISIT WWW.THEPETFUND.COM, E-MAIL INFO@THEPETFUND.COM, OR CONTACT KAREN LESLIE, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, THE PET FUND, 1510 19TH STREET, SACRAMENTO, CA 95814, (916) 443-6007.

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