



COMPASSION IN ACTION



NEWSLETTER OF THE SPCA SERVING ERIE COUNTY

SUMMER 2021

OWNED ANIMAL WELLNESS: HOW THE SPCA AND THE ANIMAL WELFARE COMMUNITY ARE RESPONDING

BY MELANIE RUSHFORTH, VICE PRESIDENT, VETERINARY SERVICES

“It’s a horrible thing that I have to worry about being able to pay for Luna’s needed healthcare. With COVID-19, my financial situation is a hundred times worse than in normal times.”

This is a statement taken verbatim from a pet owner seeking an estimate for her pet’s upcoming veterinary appointment. The appointment was in a few days, and her cat was experiencing pain and discomfort due to what was likely an infection. The appointment was requested to seek treatment, and to prepare for an upcoming spay surgery. This pet owner, like so many others, is a responsible and loving owner who has done “everything right” in this situation. The challenge at hand is the availability of assistance when financial circumstances are a barrier to care.

Prior to the economic effects of COVID-19 on employment and earnings, there was no shortage of need in the community. People are still hungry; children and pets still get sick; and housing remains in constant flux. Crisis does not wait for our financial health to align. While the SPCA Serving Erie County does not have the capacity to help every owned animal in Erie County, the organization has made impressive strides in serving pets in homes, in a focused effort to keep them there as an alternative to surrendering them in times of crisis.

Did you know that millions of pets do not receive adequate veterinary care because the costs are simply beyond a family’s ability to pay for it? The lack of access to care is the most significant animal welfare crisis affecting owned pets in the United States. The SPCA Serving Erie County is proud to be one of eight cities in the country selected by the Center for Pet Health Equity to act as an AlignCare service provider. AlignCare was designed to “align” existing community resources and activities to improve access to veterinary care. Shelters and clinics, like the Lipsey Veterinary Clinic at the SPCA Serving Erie County,



are critical in these alignments. AlignCare can reduce the number of relinquishments due to a medically treatable condition.

The principle of AlignCare is that rather than building new veterinary practices, nonprofits, and other things, if we simply better align our current resources and activities from a community-based perspective, then we can do a better job reaching families. AlignCare was conceived as a One Health project. The basic idea is that to improve health outcomes for humans, we as service providers must factor in the animals, as well as the environment or ecosystem. Animals, the environment, and humans all intersect so if we want to do a better job of reaching animals, we must factor in the reality of the humans, as well as the ecosystem.

There is set criteria to be eligible for AlignCare, including that the pet owner be in a means-tested assistance program (like WIC, SNAP, Medicaid); be bonded with the animal experiencing illness or injury; be willing and able to pay for 20% of the balance of treatment and services; and be willing to cooperate in communicating with a veterinary social work coordinator. Luna’s owner (the pet owner quoted at

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YourSPCA.org
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Twitter: @YourSPCA
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HOURS AND LOCATIONS

300 Harlem Road,
West Seneca, NY 14224

Please visit YourSPCA.org
for current adoption hours.

The SPCA Serving Erie County
is proud to be a Purina Shelter
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MISSION

At the SPCA Serving Erie County, our mission is to create a more humane community through education; rescuing, protecting, and enhancing the lives of animals; and nurturing the bond between animals and people.

The SPCA Serving Erie County is not affiliated financially in any way with any other animal agency — including the Niagara County SPCA, the ASPCA, or any other humane society or animal welfare group. Our protocols, policies, and procedures are unique to this organization, a completely independent humane society that does not receive any city, county, state, or federal tax dollars. The important programs and services of the SPCA Serving Erie County are possible only due to the caring people and organizations that support us.

FROM THE PRESIDENT & CEO



Animal Welfare has made tremendous strides since its origins nearly 200 years ago with the formation of the Royal SPCA in England in 1824, in the United States with the ASPCA in New York City in 1866, and our organization a year later. From an emphasis on overworked horses to adopting out dogs and cats from overcrowded shelters, to targeted spay and neuter efforts, the animal welfare world is in a much better place, especially for domestic animals.

Because of this great work, organizations like ours can spend more of our time concentrating now on owned animal wellness. There

were times early on in my 28 years in various roles in this field where I could not imagine that we could be concentrating on this important work today.

The focus in this work is to protect the human-animal bond, as we feel that animals are an important part of our families. Our pets add value to our lives, and it is heartbreaking when things like access to medical care, pet food, or other things that you and I may take for granted cause someone to surrender their pet in hopes of finding them a new home.

In this newsletter, you will learn more about a variety of programs and services that your support allows us to provide pet owners in need, to help them keep their families together. This may include the wonderful work being done in the Lipsey Clinic, including initiatives such as the Marie Gebura Caring Hearts Fund, AlignCare, and Pet Wellness programs.

You will learn about our Pet Food Pantry, our role in educating pet owners, and much more. To preserve that human-animal bond, we also share pet-friendly rentals, are working on trying to eliminate insurance companies from breed-restriction efforts, and we play an important role in helping victims of domestic violence who have pets and need us to help them as they find a safe place for their families to live.

Owned animal wellness also occurs every day at the time of adoption. Many first-time pet owners come through our doors and our adoption staff, Petique staff, infirmary staff, and behavior staff often play an important role in starting that new pet off in a positive way in their new home. We help many thousands of animals each year, and each is as important to us as the ones in our own homes. Thank you again for your important role in helping us help all of them.

Gary Willoughby II
President & CEO

AN INNOVATIVE APPROACH TO THE **COST OF CARE**

BY MELANIE RUSHFORTH, VICE PRESIDENT, VETERINARY SERVICES

Veterinary practices are in the unique and challenging position of balancing the medical needs of their patients with the financial needs of their clients. Pets are considered family members and the strength of the human-animal bond can lead to emotionally charged conversations between pet owners and veterinarians, especially when finances are limited and decisions about care become life or death.

The Lipsey Clinic is in a unique position and has created an environment where care can be met with affordability and payment options. We are proud to have established a partnership with Vet Billing, a third-party platform that offers a flexible solution for pet owners who may not be able to afford the cost of treatment all at once. Vet Billing helps to provide financial access to veterinary care for owners in order to care for their beloved pet.

Clients seeking to utilize the Vet Billing feature have the option of creating a payment plan for services rendered, and also a unique “pay it forward” plan to save for future services needed. This specific savings plan is becoming very popular for dental procedures which are very common in aging pets especially, and often a higher-priced service. Pet owners can plan for these essential treatments in a way that fits into their existing budget without the hassle of managing it themselves. Vet Billing will auto-draft a set amount

on a regular schedule, so pet owners can make sure there are available funds when it is time for the pet’s treatment or surgery.



In unique circumstances, pet owners under the veterinary care of the Lipsey Clinic might be eligible for assistance through the Marie Gebura Caring Heart Fund, which was established in 2015 to help those members of our community who are unable to afford the high cost of care for their pet when unexpected medical costs occur.

At the Lipsey Clinic, compassion is demonstrated every day when it comes to the treatment of our patients. Increasing comfort with the spectrum of care, offering incremental care, and thinking outside the box of traditional payment options allows our team to continue to fulfill our oath to protect animal health and welfare and prevent and relieve animal suffering while working within the financial limitations of clients. We strive to make the experience “at the vet” a painless one for both humans and pets.

OWNED ANIMAL WELLNESS CONTINUED

the beginning of this article) met this criterion and was approved for enrollment into AlignCare in Buffalo. This enrollment allowed for Luna to receive care for an illness, and it also allowed for Luna’s owner to enroll up to three additional pets into the program, which will cover care, treatment, prescriptions (to include prescription food if advised) for as long as the owner meets the criteria of AlignCare. The barrier to receiving care based solely on affordability was now lifted. This allows for Luna’s owner to keep her pets in a home they know and thrive in. Surrendering Luna, due to the cost of medical care, was now off the table.

Preserving the human-animal bond is crucial as we as a society move out of the effects of the pandemic. The human-animal bond is a mutually beneficial and dynamic relationship that is influenced by behaviors essential to the health and well-being of both. This includes, among other things, emotional, psychological, and physical interactions of people,

animals, and the environment. The veterinarian/clinic’s role in the human-animal bond is to maximize the potentials of this relationship. The Lipsey Veterinary Clinic at the SPCA Serving Erie County is not without the common challenge of the needs of the community outnumbering the available resources to offset the costs of caring for a pet. However, the innovative approach to keeping pets healthy and in the homes they know and love has resulted in a menu of options to help families provide care for their pets in unique circumstances.

Mahatma Gandhi has stated that, “The greatness of a nation and its moral progress can be judged by the way its animals are treated.” The SPCA Serving Erie County seeks to function as an organization that honors this sentiment and strives to treat the humans that are bonded with their pets with the dignity that they deserve regardless of their socioeconomic status at any moment in time.



“HAPPY VISITS!” WHAT ARE THEY AND WHY SHOULD YOU SCHEDULE THEM?

BY MELANIE RUSHFORTH, VICE PRESIDENT, VETERINARY SERVICES

One of the positive effects of COVID-19 and the stay-at-home orders we've experienced over this past year is that there has been a nationwide increase in pet adoptions throughout the pandemic. Pets provide companionship, endless love, and are known to reduce stress in their humans. Did you know there is something we can be doing to return the favor while keeping your pets healthy at the same time?

The Lipsey Veterinary Clinic at the SPCA Serving Erie County and other vet hospitals around the country has been practicing curbside service. Curbside service consists of a relatively (human) contact-less experience for treatment and exams and is designed to keep humans safe and protected from the spread of COVID-19. However, this experience is new to our furry friends, and may be a stressful and unfamiliar time for them. The Lipsey Veterinary Clinic has begun offering “Happy Visits” to prepare pets to feel at ease when coming to the vet. Here's what those look like, and why we think they're important.

For some background on why we decided to start this, we will turn to the psychology behind it.

Classical conditioning happens when animals learn to associate certain things in their environment with a positive or negative experience. Classical conditioning is at work all the time in everyday life, whether or not we intend for it to happen. Animals learn to associate what they experience with different things that occur in their environment. Figuring out how to contribute to a positive experience can be useful to pets, pet owners, and veterinary providers.

When we see your pet at the Lipsey Veterinary Clinic, we love them. We tell Fluffy that he is the best and most handsome boy around, and we mean it every time! We have cheese in a can and all the ear scratches that he can handle. However, we also have sharp things that poke. And scales that they must stand on (and who likes that?!). And a million unfamiliar smells. And as nice as everyone is, mom and dad must wait outside for now, and the foreseeable future.

COVID-19 has contributed to an environment where newly adopted pets may not be getting as much

socialization outside of their household as pets were getting pre-COVID-19. Scheduling a “Happy Visit” will help your pet become familiar with the vet’s office BEFORE going in to be vaccinated or to have a procedure. This creates a positive environment before anything needs to happen and gives your pet a place to be excited about returning to. “Happy Visits” will let your pet meet the staff, sniff around, meet the scale, get treats, pets, and compliments, and end with a plan to return for the needed services like vaccinations and nail trims. New places are sometimes anxiety-producing — just because they are new. Scheduling occasional “Happy Visits” reduces your pet’s anxiety by simply transforming the vet’s office from an unknown to a known environment.

Better yet, take along some great treats, preferably something that is incredibly special to your pet like steak or hot dogs. If you have a puppy or kitten, start your “Happy Visits” as early as possible. But don’t worry if you have an older pet or a pet who is already anxious about vet visits. “Happy Visits” can dramatically reduce an adult pet’s stress level, too.

Some things you can work into your home routine include simple things that you’re already doing, but now you can do them knowing that they will help your pet be a great patient. Getting your pet accustomed to being touched all over is essential for your pet’s comfort during an examination. In a routine exam, the veterinarian may look in your pet’s eyes, ears, and mouth, listen to his heart and lungs, touch and probe his belly, manipulate his joints, and take his temperature. Pets that are handled, petted, and touched all over daily will be less likely to perceive this as invasive, and more likely to regard it as affectionate (if somewhat personal!) touching.

In addition, when you regularly spend time touching your pet, you will be more likely to notice changes such as lumps, swelling, or tenderness that may indicate health problems.

Another very important part of this routine is to take note of your pet’s sensitive spots. Most pets have one or more spots where they prefer not to be touched. Some pets don’t like to have their paws touched, others may not like their hips, ears, or tails. This is great information to offer to the receptionist when making an appointment; that way, we can be prepared to know what to expect.

You can help even the most reluctant pet accept the handling of sensitive areas with a little patience and some great treats. Have your pet near you in a comfortable position. Then feed your pet his favorite treats while briefly touching the sensitive spot. For example, if your pet is sensitive about having his paws handled, gently and quickly stroke your pet’s paw and then give him a great treat. Once your pet



is happy about the brief touch (because he knows the treat is coming!), you can leave your hand on his paw just a little bit longer before giving him the treat. Gradually work up to holding the paw, then giving gentle squeezes, and eventually touching between his toes.

We love seeing your pets, and we look forward to their visits. Even though we don’t see your pet often, we consider them part of our clinic family. Regular wellness visits are helpful for long-term health, so please get those appointments on the calendar!

If you would like to schedule a “Happy Visit” for your cat or dog in anticipation for a future service at the Lipsey Veterinary Clinic, please call the clinic at 716-531-4700!

FROM THE BEHAVIOR & RESEARCH DEPARTMENT: OWNED ANIMAL WELLNESS

BY MIRANDA K. WORKMAN, MS, DIRECTOR OF BEHAVIOR & RESEARCH CBCC-KA, CDBC, CCBC, FEAR FREE CERTIFIED

Sharing our homes with other animals can be one of the most rewarding experiences of our lifetime. With a little bit of attention to behavior and training, we can make sure that it is also a rewarding experience for our animal companion. The Behavior & Research Department will share a few tips about how to incorporate behavior and training into your owned-animal wellness plan!

Catch your animal being good! So often, we forget to pay attention to all the wonderful things that our animals do each day. Our animal companions are making decisions all day long about how to respond to their environment and the other individuals around them. Your dog may choose to sit or lay down while you are working on your computer or scrolling on your phone. Give that dog a treat! Your cat may choose to lay down next to your computer keyboard (instead of on top of it!). Give that cat a good chin scratch! Your ferret grabs a toy to play with instead of your pants or shoes. Give that ferret a toy to play with! We often focus on what we don't like or want to change about our animal companions' choices instead of what we DO like! If we pay attention to all the good choices they make — and reward them for making those good choices — they are much more likely to make that good choice again in the future!



Know their Top Ten List! There are often various types of reinforcers that we can use to reward those good behaviors described above. There are generally three categories of reinforcers that are commonly used: A) consumables, B) objects, and C) interaction. Consumables are those items that can be consumed like food, treats, or chews that can be eaten and digested. I often count out 50 pieces of my animal companion's kibble and use them throughout the day as treats. This also helps me assess how good a job I'm doing paying attention to all the good choices they make each day! If there is still kibble in the bowl at the end of the day, I need to improve on my responses to my animal companion's choice. Objects are generally toys although some objects may not be thought of as a toy for us — like a cardboard box or a wadded-up ball of paper for cats. These are considered non-consumables. Interaction are games, activities or interactive events like playing fetch or a nice cuddle session. Make a list of the reinforcers your animal prefers so you know what to choose when you are reinforcing good behavior.

Know who your behavior and training team members are! Just as a veterinarian is an important part of your animal companion's wellness team, having a certified behavior and training professional on that wellness team can help you address the mental wellness of your animal companion. Being proactive about behavior and training is a necessity, not a luxury, to help your animal companion successfully navigate a very human-centric world. An ounce of prevention (training) is worth a pound of cure (behavior modification for problem behavior). You can find local certified training and behavior professionals at IAABC (iaabc.org) or CCPDT (ccpdt.com).

Your animal companion will be excited to be your life-long companion when you choose to use the tips above to make sure that your relationship is one of the best experiences in their life!

SPCA SERVING ERIE COUNTY'S PET FOOD PANTRY

BY AMY JAWORSKI, DIRECTOR OF ADMISSIONS

It's fair to say that the past year hasn't been easy on anyone. Unemployment, home schooling, and countless other factors have forced many families to make impossible decisions when it comes to prioritizing expenses and how to navigate the "new normal."

Last summer, we began to see an increase in phone calls looking for assistance with pet food. These were caring families who were looking at having to make the heartbreaking decision

to possibly surrender their pets due to an inability to provide necessary sustenance. This was one problem that we had the resources to help solve! Thanks to an amazing community, the SPCA regularly receives donations of pet food and other supplies. What better way to honor that donation than to ensure it makes a meaningful difference in a local animal's life?!

We began to formalize a program that would be able to assist Erie County residents and their pets with acquiring much-needed supplies. These supplies now range from food, (because the SPCA is a Purina Shelter Champions Partner, all of our food and litter is generously donated from Purina, so whenever food is donated, it can be put directly into the pantry!), toys, treats, litter, collars, leashes, and more!

The SPCA Serving Erie County's Pet Food Pantry launched in November 2020. Its mission is to assist struggling families who may not have access to pet food and supplies on a reliable basis. There are currently no requirements to qualify for the pantry's assistance and families can call 716-875-7360 ext. 224 or send an email to me at ajaworski@yoursPCA.org to get help. We also offer a delivery option (on certain days) to those who do not have access to transportation.

Aside from helping families in need directly, the Pet Pantry also works with other pantries and area rescues and our own Lipsey Clinic to ensure that pet food gets into the hands of those who need it most.

In the six months since the Pet Food Pantry opened, we have distributed more than 5,400 pounds of dry pet food, 2,200 cans of wet pet food, 600 pounds of litter, and 2,000 "other" items such as leashes, collars, toys, treats, etc. back into the community.



The park is where YOU make it this year!

Join the SPCA Serving Erie County for the 28th annual Paws in the Park, a virtual walk to benefit our community's animals!

It's fun and easy to do this year's walk! Create a team of family and friends, ask for donations on behalf of your pet, and then you choose where — and when (ideally between August 28 and September 25!) — you get your two-mile walk in!

Visit YourSPCA.org to register!

Register by July 16 using the code PITP2021 and receive \$5 off your registration!



LEAVE A LEGACY OF COMPASSION

Let your love of animals become your legacy and help sustain the operations of the SPCA for years to come by including the SPCA in your estate plans.

A bequest is one of the easiest and most impactful ways to support the SPCA's mission. Legacy giving options include:

- Wills
- Trusts
- Charitable gift annuities
- Life insurance policies
- Real estate and personal property
- Retirement benefits

For more information, visit YourSPCA.org/donate/planned-giving, or contact Jennifer Gurz, Chief Development Officer, at 716-875-7360 ext. 219 or jenniferg@yoursPCA.org.



shelter Guardians

Shelter Guardians are monthly donors who are so incredibly important to the work we do at the SPCA. These amazing people designate an amount that is automatically donated to the shelter each month. Their monthly, steady donations are the resources we depend on to give compassionate care to thousands of animals each year. Whether you can give \$5 or \$50 each month, it truly makes a difference!

Are you interested in becoming a Shelter Guardian?

There are many benefits:

- Provides a safe, secure way to donate every month.
- Choose the monthly amount that best suits you.
- You can cancel or change your donation at any time.
- Provides the domestic and wild animals at the SPCA with the care they need.
- 10% off every purchase at the SPCA's Petique.
- 10% off on every PawsWay purchase.
- Receive fewer mailings while still being informed about special shelter news and updates.

Enroll online at YourSPCA.org/shelterguardians or call Colleen at 716-875-7360 ext. 227.