

Locals to the Rescue

Written by Janet Goodman, BT Contributor
September 2015

Volunteer organizations help stray animals

A



Animal rescue groups play vital roles in South Florida. Often the tasks of picking up strays, finding homes for unwanted pets, even sterilizing and vaccinating thousands of animals are carried out by all-volunteer organizations devoted to helping those in need.

Two of our community's newest rescue groups are A Way for a Stray and Saving Sage. Both are 501(c)(3) not-for-profit corporations based in Miami Shores. Founded by women, they provide important backup to beleaguered Miami-Dade Animal Services, the county shelter whose space for animals is limited, as is its public funding.

Founded in April 2013 by Cristina Butler and Carla Boyadjian, A Way for a Stray (www.awayforastray.org) is a foster-based rescue, with foster parents in Dade, Broward, and Palm Beach counties. According to past president and now secretary/treasurer/board member Butler, they're proud of saving nearly 300 dogs in a mere two years, with only a small group of volunteers. During this time, AWFAS has raised \$100,000 in donations; funds mostly go toward vetting stray dogs, many of which are sick or injured; vet bills easily soar into the thousands.

Vaccinations, sterilizations, and setting up fosters with monthly flea, tick, and heartworm preventatives are costly, too. "Our mission is to care for and place the homeless, neglected, and abandoned dogs in Miami," says Butler. "Once we commit to an animal, they're with us till they find their forever home."

Locals to the Rescue

Written by Janet Goodman, BT Contributor
September 2015

A typical day for AWFAS starts with scheduling vet appointments and arranging transportation. Networking is crucial, from communicating with other groups about foster spots to posting pets on social media and adoption sites. Butler admits, "It's certainly a full-time job. [We're] answering inquiries on available pets and pleas for help to place a pet or help with a found pet, working direct with Animal Services to pull animals in need of rescue, recruiting new foster homes, processing applications for adoption or fostering, arranging home visits, and fundraising."

Finding foster homes is their biggest hurdle. "If we have no fosters, we can't continue to save," she adds. "We usually have all other components to save a dog, and a foster space is usually the hardest piece of the puzzle to place."

Heartbreak comes with the territory. "We're very concerned with the human race these days, and the general disregard for living things," she notes. "It's sad to see how animals are treated, and we hope to facilitate a change in everything we do."

Spaying and neutering are concerns, too, and AWFAS wants to be proactive. "We'd love to become a rescue that educates the public and youth on responsible pet ownership," says Butler, "so that stray populations decrease and animals are treated in the proper way."

She thinks more could be done by local government to get word out on existing sterilization programs. Education is key to changing the way people view pet ownership. "We need to continue the good fight and hope the ripple effect comes into play," she says. "I've seen it firsthand and know it works, so we can't give up."

Saving Sage Animal Rescue Foundation (www.savingsagerescue.org) was founded in October 2014 by Karina Goldenberg and Regina Vlasek following the rescue of a pit bull fight-ring "bait" dog and her seven puppies. Response was generous: \$3000 was raised to care for her injuries; thus this foster-based group began.

"When it comes to the unpredictable nature of rescuing animals, every day is different," says Goldenberg. "But some of our regular activities include handling adoptions of cats at Petco in

Locals to the Rescue

Written by Janet Goodman, BT Contributor
September 2015

Hallandale, our adoptions partner, organizing efforts of volunteers, managing our social media campaigns, and finally coming home to rescue dogs and a houseful of kittens -- many still bottle feeding -- that Regina and I have at our homes.”

Saving Sage has rescued 152 cats and dogs plus two bunnies, but nothing felt better than dozens of people coming together through them to raise money to donate a microchip scanner to Miami Shores Police Department. It’s one small step for this fledgling organization that’s plagued by “staggering numbers of animals in distress and lack of funds to properly help them.” Goldenberg believes there’s a need for more foster homes, volunteers, and veterinarians willing to partner by offering services at discounted rates.

Broader issues also must be addressed in order to make a difference. Her top concerns are animal overpopulation, a county shelter ill equipped to handle the sheer volume of animals that need help, and attitudes and views held by some in the community that dogs and cats are disposable.

To solve these, Goldenberg suggests “a top-to-bottom approach, starting in our school system with educational programs and finishing in Tallahassee with the state legislature enacting laws that treat animals as more than mere property. Stiffer penalties for animal abuse/cruelty and requiring that all animals be microchipped are essential.”

Janet Goodman is a Miami Shores-based dog trainer, animal-talent wrangler, and principal of Good Dog Bad Dog Inc. Contact her at info@gooddogbaddogmiami.com.

Feedback: letters@biscaynetimes.com

Locals to the Rescue

Written by Janet Goodman, BT Contributor
September 2015
