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Protecting pets

CARE4Paws is hosting a pet food drive and donation-matching campaign this month to help pet owners and animals in need



SAFE AND HEALTHY: CARE4Paws' September pet food and donation drive aims to help the organization continue to serve local pets and their owners with free pet food, spaying and neutering services, veterinary care, and more.

BY MALEA MARTIN

It's well documented that owning a pet can help reduce anxiety and depression. Studies conducted by the Human Animal Bond Research Institute found that pets can alleviate worry, provide comfort, and even reduce blood pressure in their owners.

But when owning a pet becomes a financial burden, some of those positive effects can be threatened—and during the pandemic, financial woes are becoming all too common.

“Right now, the tricky thing is that people need their pets more than ever, but at the same time they're having a hard time providing for their pets,” said Isabelle Gullo, co-founder and executive director of CARE4Paws, which provides community, awareness, responsibility, and education (CARE) for owners and their pets in Santa Barbara County.

“We want to provide services that these pet owners otherwise might not be able to afford, to make sure that these pets can stay in their homes and continue providing that emotional support to their owners,” Gullo continued.

This became the inspiration for the organization's September Pet Food and Matching Donation Drive. Donors will have their contribution matched until the organization reaches \$10,000 in donations, Gullo said, thanks to private donors who contributed to the matching fund.

“The idea with the donation drive is, because we're providing an unparalleled number of services, we want to make sure that we can continue providing support to the community at this high level through COVID and beyond,” Gullo said.

Since the pandemic started, the organization has provided about 4 tons of pet food and cat litter to pets in need every week. In 2019, 2 tons of food were distributed—for the entire year. Spays and neuters have also gone up, with the organization this year already exceeding the number of procedures performed in all of 2019.

“It's something that we never could have anticipated,” Gullo said.

The money raised from the drive will also help support the organization's various other programs, including low-cost or free veterinary care, vaccine clinics, education, community outreach, intervention, and CARE4Paws' mobile clinic.

The mobile clinic runs four to five days a week, Gullo said, and works its way from Santa Barbara to Lompoc, and then through the Santa Maria Valley. Lompoc and Santa Maria receive 65 percent of the

mobile clinic's services.

CARE4Paws' also continues to run its Safe Haven program to help pet owners experiencing domestic violence.

“We provide support for domestic violence survivors where we put their pets into foster care or boarding so that the owners can leave an abusive situation without fearing for the well-being of their pet,” Gullo said. “On average, a woman will stay two years longer in an abusive situation because of a pet.”

More people staying at home than usual, due to the pandemic, can lead to increases in domestic violence, District Attorney Joyce Dudley told the *Sun* in April. Gullo said the Safe Haven program is partnered with the District Attorney's Office, as well as Domestic Violence Solutions.

“We want to make sure that we provide a safe space for the pets so that the owner can transition into a safe space for themselves,” Gullo said.

Just a few days into the fundraiser, Gullo said they had already received \$2,000 in donations. But even after the \$10,000 is reached, CARE4Paws is always accepting donations and community support.

For those who want to give pet food rather than a monetary donation, drop-off locations are at CARE4Paws partner stores including Lemos Feed & Pet Supply, Montecito Pet Shop, La Cumbre Feed, and PetSmart on Milpas Street in Santa Barbara. Details for the drive can be found at care4paws.org/drive.

Highlight

• Santa Maria Joint Union High School District announced Sept. 2 that a Santa Maria High School teacher is spearheading a sidewalk book drive and giveaway to promote reading and literacy. English teacher Annie Turner was inspired to start the effort after learning that her students didn't know “where to get books or have access to books in their homes,” a district press release stated. The book drive will be held on Wednesdays and Thursdays from 1:45 to 2:45 p.m. in front the high school's bus pickup zone, with an emphasis on books for fifth grade through collegiate reading levels. “This sidewalk special is my attempt to promote literacy and reading in the children and community,” Turner said in the release. “It is for all SMHS students and anyone who walks by. ... The more kids read, the better equipped they'll be.” ☉

Staff Writer Malea Martin wrote this week's Spotlight. Send tips to spotlight@santamariasun.com.

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Thanks for entering your music!

It's in the judges' hands now!

Winners will be selected by the end of September

Readers Choice voting will take place from October 1-19

Stay tuned for more info to come about this year's event!

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