

Pet Project for Pets now helps Seniors, Victims & Unemployed Keep Their Pets

By Pet Project for Pets

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Pet Project for Pets provides pet food, pet supplies and pet meds for those who are terminally ill, disabled or handicapped, living with HIV /Aids so that they can keep their pets. We are the 'Step Before a Shelter' for many animals.

A STEP BEFORE A SHELTER FOR MANY ANIMALS WHILE PRESERVING THE HUMAN/ANIMAL BOND

This past week, Sue Martino, the new Executive Director for Pet Project for Pets (The Pet Project) took a day off from the fundraising planning, community outreach and volunteer search to make home deliveries for The Pet Project clients, and it was a very emotional experience. "Seeing firsthand the appreciation of our clients and seeing their pets is amazingly touching. We are the last chance for the cat, dog, or other animal companion of our clients that would otherwise be put up for adoption, abandoned, or prematurely euthanized," Sue Martino explains. "It was very moving to realize how little some of these people have left, other than their animal. I can certainly understand how much a long-time pet would mean to me if almost everything else in my life had been lost or taken away from me through unexpected illness or financial hardship."

For seven years now The Pet Project has enabled its clients who face financial hardship to keep their companion animals, but until a few months ago, it concentrated its pet food assistance program only on terminally ill or permanently disabled clients. Now The Pet Project has started to expand its outreach to senior citizens living on fixed incomes, people who are victims of violent crimes or accidents, and those faced with extended unemployment or home foreclosure.

The Pet Project was created in 2002 at the direction of Robert N. DeBenedictis. It was his love for animals and his concern for those people who were still suffering the permanent and debilitating consequences of living with HIV/AIDS that motivated him to urge The Robert N. DeBenedictis Foundation to make a long-term commitment to cover all of the administrative costs of this charity.

According to Sue, "The large and well established programs in the community were doing an adequate job of meeting the needs of people living with HIV/AIDS, but there was no program enabling them to keep and maintain their pet animals.. This was something important that was falling thru the cracks." She passionately believed this and enthusiastically became a member of The Pet Project Board of Directors and shortly thereafter stepped up to the plate when asked to become the new Executive Director of The Pet Project. Presently, it is Sue's aim to loosen up the qualifying requirements of Pet Project clients to include people needing temporary assistance with a short-term emergency in an effort to not turn anyone away who does not want to be separated from their pet animal because of illness and/or hardship.

With all of her good work and intentions, Sue admits that this has been a very rough year, claiming, "Most of our funding comes from foundations that are heavily invested in South Florida real estate, so we have had to get creative in order to not interrupt the service to our clients and their animals." This has prompted her to be very aggressive in local fundraising efforts at community events, which comes at a price. "We are very aware of how easy it is to burn out our volunteers, so we are doing everything we can to recruit new volunteers so that everybody is just called on once a month," Sue said.

So what keeps Sue Martino going? "Every time I see another person filling out an application form, I know that there will be one less animal that ends up in a shelter," she says. "When somebody has had an animal for years, and then all of the sudden can no longer afford to keep it, for whatever reason, that person needs to know that we are here for them. That is what we do – we are the step before a shelter for many animals

and we work to preserve the human/animal bond. I could not have a more rewarding job, than to be a part of helping animals and making it possible for the people who love them to enjoy their lifelong relationships together.”

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Pet Project for Pets is a nonprofit 501 c 3 that provides pet food, pet supplies and pet meds for those who are terminally ill, disabled, seniors on a low fixed income and victims of violent crimes so they can keep their pet. We are a Step Before a Shelter

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