



Aid for Pet Owners

CARE4Paws Launches Pet Assistance Program

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By [Kamilla Plambeck](#)

The Companion Pet Assistance (CPA) program was launched earlier this year by CARE4Paws with a special view to aiding pet owners who struggle to provide needed care for their four-legged family members. Animal shelters throughout the county are overcrowded, but Isabelle Güllo, cofounder and president of Santa Barbara's CARE4Paws, hopes that people will now seek the necessary help rather than give up their pets to a shelter.

“After building our other CARE4Paws programs, all geared toward keeping animals out of shelters, we realized there was a missing link,” said Güllo. “So many people out there are struggling, whether financially or physically, to properly care for their pets. Most of them really don't want to relinquish their best friends to a shelter, but they feel they have no other choice. With Companion Pet Assistance, they will have a choice.”

Currently, the funding for the Companion Pet program is limited — “Close to nothing,” Gullo said — and consequently only a small number of clients can be accepted. Güllo, however, is convinced that as soon as word spreads about this new opportunity for struggling pet owners,

CARE4Paws will be able to provide assistance for anybody who needs help, “I have a feeling we’ll get really busy,” she said.

CARE4Paws has partnered with nonprofit organization Catholic Charities, which provides social services to people in need. Over the years, the organization has also met more and more people, especially elderly residents, who find it difficult to provide the proper care for their pets whether it is covering medical costs or picking up pet food. Wagging Dog Tales is a small fund that Catholic Charities uses to help seniors with their pets; working together with the Companion Pet program, the two organizations are able to refer clients to one another, which, in many cases, will mean that people get to keep their furry friends.

Since the program’s launch, at least 20 cases have been handled by a team of dedicated volunteers. The team is able to assist pet owners “with basic pet care during hard times.” Whether it is delivering food or cat litter, grooming, dog walking, or cleaning birdcages and litter boxes, help is now available. In addition, CARE4Paws also provides assistance with pet spaying and neutering for low-income pet owners.

Güllo and her husband, Carlos Abitia, cofounder and vice president of CARE4Paws, would like to see fewer animals in the county’s shelters, and they believe that “people would hang onto their pets if they were aware of the program.” It is definitely not about people neglecting their pets, Güllo emphasized. It is a question of making ends meet. “People generally take good care of their pets. The biggest problem is that people can’t afford the medical costs,” she said.

For now, the program cannot cover bigger medical costs, but Güllo hopes that eventually they will be able to help with that as well. “We don’t have any medical funds yet, but we are able to help with little things like fleas, which, if not treated, can potentially become dangerous.”