

LAS CRUCES SUN-NEWS

On the Positive Side: Help line offers support for pets and their guardians

By Bill Smith / For the Sun-News

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Do you need help finding a lost pet or returning a found pet to its guardian? Need help dealing with homeless/orphan animals, or finding an adoptable pet? A call to the pet help line, supported by the Humane Society of Southern New Mexico (HSSNM), may be able to direct you to the help you need.

In operation since March 2009, the help line is a community resource that relies on volunteers to for its staff.

Although the help line is primarily an information resource, it is not uncommon for help line volunteers to assist callers more actively when no other help seems immediately available. Most often this takes the form of rescuing an animal or following up on a request for help when normal resources don't lend themselves to a resolution. And it is these unusual calls that often yield the most satisfaction.

For example, in early November 2010 a caller reported a stray tortoiseshell kitten seen for several days at the garden center of a local home improvement store. With the store manager's permission and a borrowed trap, we rescued the kitten. After an initial health check, the frightened kitten was given its first inoculations and placed in a foster home. Mitzi was subsequently spayed, spent more time being socialized in her foster home, and is now ready for adoption.

And then there was the scruffy white terrier mix found wandering near Lohman and Espina late one night by an Albuquerque businessman on his way home. The help line volunteer who took the call decided to meet the caller, keep the dog overnight and then make a found dog report to ASCMV the following morning. When no one claimed the dog, he was accepted into the HSSNM adoption program. Bathed, groomed, and with neutering in his future, Harley quickly found a forever home.

A most unusual request for help came from a caller who had a family member stranded in a large southern city, with a dog that needed to be returned to Las Cruces. Although local family members had arranged to fly the dog home, the dog's owner had no way to get it to the airport some 15 miles away. With no readily available solution, a little creativity was needed. Our help line volunteer searched the internet and found a couple of rescue groups in the area, one of which offered to transport the dog. The local family was given the contact information for the rescue group and presumably the dog made it safely home.

Although not all calls present the unusual circumstances that these three did, they all present the opportunity to help an animal in need. Whether we are fielding a call about a found or lost pet, or being confronted with the problem of finding a new home for a pet, uppermost in the volunteer's mind is the knowledge that there is an animal behind the call that needs our help.

With no regularly scheduled office staff, HSSNM relies solely on volunteers to staff the help line. If there is no one in the office to answer a call, the call is automatically transferred to the voicemail of several volunteers, one of whom will respond to the call, most often within the same day.

For some, working directly with animals at shelters or rescue groups can be too physically demanding. For others it may be emotionally draining. Volunteering with the pet help line can be an alternative way to express your compassion for animals. If being a telephone resource appeals to you, and you can spare a morning or afternoon once a week, call the HSSNM office (575) 523-8020 and leave a message. We will arrange training and mentoring.

Bill Smith is an HSSNM pet help line volunteer.