

Help shelter save injured strays

Animal Care & Control fund that pays for medical care needs boost

BY AMY SACKS
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THE CITY-run shelter is desperate to rebuild a depleted fund that helps provide medical care to sick and injured stray animals.

"The pot is empty," said New York City Animal Care & Control Manhattan shelter manager Liz Keller. "Right now there's a zero balance and we can't help treat these animals."

The STAR (Special Treatment and Recovery) program was created to provide medical treatment to cats and dogs that might otherwise be euthanized. Despite having helped many New York City strays, the fund has been out of money for some time.

That means dogs like Rachel, a sweet, brindle-colored pit bull found emaciated and severely dehydrated in the Bronx, and Corona, a 7-month-old brown tiger kitten that fell from a high-rise, cannot get proper medical care.

Because Animal Care & Control shelters lack a full-service medical facility, Rachel and Corona need an outside veterinary hospital in order to fully recover and become more adoptable.

Unlike the ASPCA, Humane Society and other "no-kill" shelters, the Animal Care & Control is required to take in any animal brought into its three shelters or left on the street.

It is the only nonprofit organization that holds a contract with

the city to handle its stray and unwanted animals, an estimated 44,000 animals a year, operating on a meager \$8 million budget.

Every day, shelter workers encounter animals that years ago would have been euthanized immediately. Homeless and abandoned pets whose medical or behavioral condition is poor tend to be considered unadoptable, even though many are simply reacting to the trauma of an injury or the stress of the environment.

The STAR program allows Animal Care & Control to provide these animals with the time and treatment needed to become adoptable. This is done with the help and support of volunteers, local veterinarians and foster families willing to accept temporary placement of an animal away from the shelter and in a loving home.

With so many healthy animals being euthanized, some might ask why help those that need medical care.

"You hate to say you can't help this animal and not give it a chance to get adopted and have to euthanize it right away," Keller said.

In some cases, euthanizing a seriously injured animal is the only way to help these animals, like one dog that was recently hit by three different cars on the Major Deegan Expressway.

"We were able to give him



Animal Care & Control's Liz Keller and Miracle are great pals after his life was saved with generous funding; Rachel (inset), a sweet pit bull, is in poor physical shape and needs medical care. Photos by Michael Schwartz



him to stop his suffering," said Keller.

But many times a certain dog or cat, puppy or kitten will come in and grab a worker's heart, and they can't handle euthanizing the animal.

It's an emotion that Keller knows firsthand.

Seven years ago, she rescued a little 8-week-old shepherd-mix puppy that had been beaten and buried alive. Due to the high veterinary costs for treatment, the

ailing pooch was slated to be euthanized.

"I went to visit him at the vet hospital and I looked at him and he gave me a kiss and thumped his little tail and I could not do it," said Keller, who adopted the dog and named him Miracle. Instead, she asked the public for help and big-hearted New Yorkers came to his aid.

Today, Miracle works as a humane educator, visiting schools to teach children how to properly

care for their pets and what to do if they see an animal that is being abused.

Keller also said the STAR program fund serves another purpose. It helps "the staff see happy endings."

To donate to the STAR fund, send check made payable to: Liz Keller, STAR Fund, N.Y.C. Animal Care & Control, 11 Park Place, Suite 805, N.Y., N.Y. 10007, or visit online at www.nycacc.org.

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