

Help in Tough Financial Times for Cat Lovers

Becky Robinson, founder of Alley Cat Allies, discusses ways to help make ends meet while caring for cats.

By Becky Robinson

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Q: In these tough financial times, I struggle to make ends meet for my whole family — including my pets and my feral cat colony. Do you have any tips to make providing care more affordable? What if one of them requires veterinary care? I don't know if I'll be able to afford it.

A: I'm sorry to hear that you are dealing with a problem so many Americans are facing, and my heart goes out to you. It is good that you are planning ahead and preparing. Alley Cat Allies knows of multiple options for help with veterinary care, as well as ideas that will allow you to continue to provide for your feral cat colony.

Feral Cat Colony Financial Help

If you are caring for a feral cat colony, there are multiple avenues to find support to help you obtain affordable or free food and shelter for the cats.

Resources for Obtaining Cat Food Check for surplus food at your local humane society, or human food bank, or local food pantries. Feeding America has an online food bank locator. Click here to see pet food banks around the country. Ask your local market or pet supply store to donate broken packages or dented cans. Some retailers will also donate out-of-date products, which are still good for a few months longer than the sell-by date. Ask local vet clinics if they have surplus or just-out-of-date premium pet foods that they are willing to donate. Hold a cat food drive. Announce the drive in the local paper to collect donations from the public. Your workplace, local religious institutions, and civic or youth groups may be willing to help as well. Sometimes youth groups, clubs, and high schools require community projects that benefit both people and animals. Work with your local scout troop or volunteer organization on the drive for feral cat caregivers. Ask local markets and pet supply shops if you may put out an attractive bin requesting cat food donations.

Resources for Obtaining Shelters/Cat Houses for Feral Cats Ask for scrap lumber from building supply stores or contractors, often available at little or no cost. Place an ad asking for used dog houses. This could net several free shelters that, with minor improvements, can be made suitable for cats (usually insulation needs to be added and the door made smaller). Host a shelter building party. Get together with other caregivers and/or your local feral cat organization's supporters to build the houses together. Contact a local Boy or Girl Scout or other youth organization and ask interested youth to complete a service project to help build shelters. Alley Cat Allies' website shows several inexpensive shelters you can make yourself.

Spay/Neuter Help Alley Cat Allies' Feral Friends Network is a group of organizations or individuals with feral cat expertise and veterinary practices and clinics that provide neuter surgeries for feral cats located in communities nationwide. Click here to locate a Feral Friend near you who may offer low-cost or subsidized spay/neuter surgery for feral cats.

Veterinary Care

Emergency veterinary care can be costly. These national organizations provide funds to those in need. AAHA Helping Pets Fund This fund helps those in need access quality veterinary care for sick or injured pets. Grants temporarily suspended but will begin again in July 2009. Angels4Animals Friends or veterinarians use the "contact us" page to refer an animal family in need of financial assistance. CareCredit Offers a revolving line of credit for veterinary expenses. Cats in Crisis Helps individuals and humane organizations care for cats with chronic or emergency medical conditions through financial and fundraising assistance. Grants temporarily suspended, but check often for update. Feline Veterinary Emergency Assistance Program This program provides financial assistance to cat and kitten guardians who are unable to afford veterinary services to save their companions when life-threatening illness or injury strikes. Help-A-Pet Help-A-Pet provides financial assistance nationwide for the medical care of pets whose owners are unable to afford the expense; for individuals with income below \$20,000 or a family income below \$40,000. IMOM Financial assistance for life-threatening and emergency veterinary care. IMOM is dedicated to ensuring that no companion animal has to be euthanized simply because their caretaker is financially challenged. The Pet Fund



Provides financial assistance to owners of domestic animals who need urgent veterinary care. United Animal Nations LifeLine grants help Good Samaritans, animal rescuers and low-income families with the high cost of caring for pets by providing grants to meet emergency veterinary expenses they otherwise couldn't afford.

Locale Specific Veterinary Care

Many local shelters, humane societies, clinics, and pet organizations have special emergency funds to use for families who need special assistance within their communities. Here are a handful, some of which also provide additional help for ongoing animal care: Atlanta: Pets Are Loving Support P.A.L.S. provides pet-care, including free food and basic veterinary care, and support to the companion pets of critically ill and disabled Atlantans. Central Ohio: Pet Promise Provides financial assistance to low-income pet owners who can't afford medical care for their pets. Also sponsors Operation Fill-A-Bowl, providing free of charge, cat and dog food to pet owners who need assistance and to the caretakers of feral cat populations. Their City Kitty program provides vaccinations and spay/neuter surgeries for feral cats. Connecticut Humane Society Connecticut Humane Society's Fox Memorial Clinic is a full-service veterinary practice that provides veterinary care for animals whose owners are in financial need. New York: NY Save Aid and assistance for low-income pet owners residing in one of the five boroughs of New York City, whose pet is in need of emergency veterinary care. Northern Nevada/Lake Tahoe: Shakespeare Animal Fund People in the Northern Nevada/Lake Tahoe area can apply for funds, with an emphasis on those on fixed incomes or with annual incomes below \$35,000.