

'Guardian Angels' Look Out for Soldiers' Pets

Network of volunteers provides temporary foster care for cats and dogs.

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Cats such as this one in Minnesota are fostered while their military-personnel owners are deployed. Photo courtesy Guardian Angels for Soldiers' Pets. Carole Olmedo and Linda Spurlin-Dominik oversee a network of foster home caregivers dedicated to looking after the cats and dogs of soldiers who need a temporary home for their furry friends during deployment.

The nonprofit organization Guardian Angels for Soldiers' Pet (GASP) formed in 2005 in Hot Springs, Ark., after the founders learned that military service members across the country were struggling to find people to look after their pets while they served abroad. The mission of GASP is to find volunteers who can provide suitable foster homes while soldiers are deployed, in training or rehabilitation.

Since the program was established, Spurlin-Dominik said, "we have grown so fast, so quickly."

As of Dec. 31, there were 45 pets in the foster-home program. Once soldier and pet are reunited after the foster term, the event is considered a mission accomplished.

The duration of foster-care terms averages from six to 15 months. In most cases, the pet owner covers related costs, such as food, grooming and medical care when needed.

By supporting the military, veterans and their beloved pets, Spurlin-Dominik said, the organization does its part to help deployments go smoothly.