

Pet Charities: How You Can Help an Animal in Need

'Tis the season to be charitable to furry friends in need.

By Emily Edmonds

With hundreds of worthy pet organizations that could use your help, it can be tempting to just give to the last one that ran a heart-wrenching commercial. But with a little research, you can reward a group that you truly find meaningful. "Pick a charity that reflects your values and delivers on promises," says Carri Harte of Maguire/Maguire, an association management firm that screens groups for the nonprofit Animal Charities of America. Harte offers her tips on finding a pet-friendly foundation.



Lydia Nichols

Ask for Opinions

Talk to fellow pet lovers—owners, kennel operators, veterinarians and groomers—and have them share their experiences with donating to various organizations. They can also be a great resource for learning about lesser-known charities.

Find a Cause

"Do some research to choose the group that particularly speaks to you," says Harte. While national organizations frequently work on big picture issues, such as animal rights legislation and awareness campaigns, local ones are more likely to serve a niche need in their community. Ultimately, what matters most is that you believe in the mission. Check websites like animalcharitiesofamerica.org, a nonprofit federation of national groups, and localanimalcharities.org, which lists community focused organizations that rescue, nurture and rehabilitate animals.

Track Your Donation

Ideally, the majority of a charity's budget—70% or more—should be going toward programs, not fundraising costs or staff salaries, says Harte. The IRS requires tax-exempt organizations to file a 990 form, which details their purpose, programs and finances. It should be posted on the group's website or on charitynavigator.org and guidestar.org. "If something on the form raises questions, call the charity," says Harte. "Any reputable company will be happy to explain where their funds go."

Play Favorites

Every donation involves a processing fee, so giving a larger amount to a single group rather than a small sum to several may have a greater impact. Some organizations may even allow a monthly payment plan. Consider pooling your resources with like-minded friends for an agreed-upon cause or even hosting a neighborhood fundraising event, like a bake sale.

Helping Cats and Dogs

Alley Cat Rescue

ACR sterilizes and vaccinates stray cats through the trap-neuter-return (TNR) program. saveacat.org

Angel Canines for Wounded Warriors

Through a partnership with American Airlines, this organization provides wounded war veterans with free flights to special facilities so they can train and acquire a service dog. angelcaninesforwoundedwarriors.org

Labs4Rescue

The mission of this nonprofit is to rescue Labrador retrievers and Lab mixes from shelters throughout the Northeast and South and place them in loving homes. labs4rescue.org

Noah's Wish

During natural disasters, the foundation sets up shelters for displaced animals. It also offers nationwide training courses on the skills needed during an emergency. noahswish.org

Originally published in the November 2013 issue of Family Circle magazine.