

Sam's Hope marks first year of helping pet owners

By Rebecca Guterman Correspondent | Posted: Monday, July 7, 2014 1:00 am

After feeding more than 1,500 pets whose owners were in need and providing free veterinary care to 23 pets, fledgling nonprofit Sam's Hope is proud of its first year.

Northampton resident Marianne Iaquinto started the federally registered charity to help low-income, disabled, elderly or sick owners of cats and dogs in Bucks, Montgomery and Philadelphia counties. She and about six other volunteers run Sam's Hope.

Sam's Hope gave grants for 15 dogs and eight cats to receive free veterinary care in the past year. The grants fund up to \$500 — or more, in extreme circumstances — and require the applicant to have demonstrated financial need, according to Iaquinto.

The charity helped Liz Hendley, of Warminster, by having a veterinarian come to her house to give shots to her 8-year-old Lab, Shadow, and clip the dog's nails. The 125-pound dog was too heavy for her to take to the vet, Hendley said, and his nails were getting too long for him to walk comfortably. The vet also told Hendley that Shadow has arthritis and needs to go on a diet.

“It would hurt me to my heart if anything happens to him. It would also affect the little one (her Yorkshire terrier, ChiChi) because they have become such great buddies,” she said.

Another grant went to Coco, an emotional-support Chihuahua for Patricia Vertlieb, of Philadelphia. Vertlieb has secondary progressive multiple sclerosis and lives with her 34-year-old daughter, who is mildly intellectually challenged.

Iaquinto came to the rescue when Coco needed to go to the vet for a heart problem a year ago and Vertlieb didn't think she could afford the transportation and treatment costs.

“Without (Iaquinto's) help we wouldn't be able to ... do anything. We'd be in debt up to our eyeballs because I don't know where I'd get the money from. She has improved the quality of my life and my daughter's life by keeping Coco healthy,” Vertlieb said.



Sam's Hope

Liz Hendley in her Warminster home with ChiChi and Shadow. She has received free vet care and food for her pets through Sam's Hope.

Sam's Hope has distributed more than 33,000 pounds of pet food since last July. The food is collected in donation boxes at area grocery stores. It's distributed through three food pantries and to residents of an apartment complex that serves elderly, low-income people. Plus, there is direct delivery to individuals who are homebound.

Looking to the next year, Iaquinto said she hopes her group can serve twice as many pets as they did this year and add a spay-and-neuter grant program.

Iaquinto quit her job to start Sam's Hope because of her love for her own Shih Tzu, Samantha, who passed away in 2012 after numerous health problems. Samantha is the Sam in the group's name.

"We often thought if someone had less means than we did, they might have to surrender (the pet) to a shelter," she said.

Nationally, about 7.6 million animals enter shelters each year; 2.7 million are adopted each year and another 2.7 million are euthanized, the ASPCA estimates.

More information on the charity: samshope.org.