

By Marianne Iaquinto

# Sam's Hope Keeping Pets & Their People Together

**I**magine that you live alone, are disabled, on a fixed income, and your pet is your only family.

Your pet is sick, so sick that he appears to be dying before your very eyes. You make that frantic call to the veterinarian, hoping that they will agree to treat the pet and allow you to make small monthly payments. You are told that if you cannot make payment in full prior to treatment to have the pet put down.

This is a call we received from a very upset and tearful woman in early January 2015. With no money and unable to qualify for Care Credit, she did not know what to do or where to turn to for help for her beloved cat.

A fifty mile drive and a few hours later, the cat was treated by Sam's Hope's veterinary partner for a partial urinary tract obstruction, a potentially life-threatening condition.

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Every 4 seconds, another companion animal enters a shelter in the United States. That's twenty-one thousand, six hundred pets per day, one hundred fifty one thousand, two hundred pets per week, seven to eight million pets per year.

More than fifty percent of pets that enter shelters never find a new home; five out of ten dogs and seven out of ten cats are killed in shelters.

Approximately 1 million surrenders per year are due to the owners' financial inability to provide the basic needs for their pets. All too often, difficult choices have to be made; pay the rent or provide food or vet care for the pet. The lives of over half a million companion animals can be saved each year by simply providing their basic needs; pet food and veterinary care.

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Founded in 2013, Sam's Hope is a nonprofit animal welfare organization dedicated to saving the lives of companion animals by keeping them out of shelters, where they face a very uncertain future, and with their families.

Struggling pet owners receive help through three program areas:

**Pet Food Assistance Program** – pet food and supplies are distributed via four food pantries, two in-home support programs and directly to pet owners in need.

**Veterinary Care Assistance Program** – financial assistance for annual wellness exams, vaccinations, illnesses, medications, as well as assistance to offset costs in emergency medical situations.



Meals for the Pets of the Homebound Elderly – pet food and supplies delivered to the door to homebound elderly pet owners via partner in-home support programs, home-delivered meals programs, and directly to pet owners in need.

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Sam's Hope's work is relatively unique, as its focus is on preventing animal homelessness, and protecting the human-animal bond. The goal is to ensure that every loved and wanted pet stays in their home with their family,

for the benefit of the pet and the pet owner. While the benefit to the pet staying with his/her family is obvious, the benefit to the pet owner is one-hundred fold.

*A pet is a medication without side effects that has so many benefits. I can't always explain it myself, but for years now I've seen how instances of having a pet is like an effective drug. It really does help people.* Dr. Edward Creagan, Oncologist at Mayo Clinic, Rochester, MN.

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Donations and grants fund Sam's Hope's mission. The work is done by ten volunteers that have picked up and distributed sixty thousand plus pounds of pet food and supplies to three thousand plus needy pets in Bucks, Montgomery and Philadelphia Counties since July 2013.

In the same timeframe, fifty-five veterinary care assistance grants were awarded to needy pets and their families.

The newest program, Meals for the Pets of the Homebound Elderly, is currently providing home-delivered meals to sixty-seven pets of the elderly; the goal for 2015 is home-delivered meals for two hundred and fifty pets.

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*Marianne Iaquinto, Founder & President of Sam's Hope, is co-owner of Tony's Pizza City in Wyndmoor, PA, and former VP of a national child identification and safety education franchise. Inspired by her beloved Shih Tzu, Samantha, and her awareness of the current economic climate which forces many pet owners to surrender or abandon their pets, she established Sam's Hope with a mission of keeping pets with their families and out of shelters. Marianne, a long-time resident of Richboro, PA, lives with her husband, Tony and their beloved rescue dog, Molly. She enjoys photography and gardening.*