

INSPIRE ME, LOCAL NEWS

Inspire Me: BADRAP connects pet owners with resources to survive the pandemic

  by Supriya Yelimeli and Bay City News Foundation
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A tumultuous year was in full swing when, one month ago, northern California social worker Jennifer Contreras found love in an abandoned and injured pit bull mix puppy named Zoe.

It didn't take long for the two to create a deep bond, but then Contreras learned Zoe had heartworms — a common condition, but one that can be very expensive to treat.

Faced with a \$1,600 estimate for treatment, Contreras was relieved to find support through BADRAP, a Bay Area animal welfare group that has been helping dog owners find help during times of crisis. They've worked with about 50 families with subsidized pet health care since the pandemic began. The Oakland-based nonprofit has even delivered groceries to struggling owners, helping people care for their pets — and themselves — by providing resources and expertise.

“Many people who are facing hunger will choose to feed their dog before they feed themselves,” said BADRAP founder Donna Reynolds.

BADRAP was founded in 1999 to support pit bulls and dogs in general. The nonprofit started helping dog owners find housing and other resources about 10 years ago when Reynolds realized pet owners were often shamed by other pet owners for not being able to afford help for their pets.

“When [COVID-19] arrived, we knew there was going to be a big gap for people in resources for their dogs and for their family,” Reynolds said. “So in helping people work out solutions so they can keep their dogs and avoid giving them up to the shelters, we may also do a little work to ensure the families have groceries too to make sure everybody is getting what they need.”

This is not BADRAP's first time taking on a crisis. The organization provided support to residents throughout Northern California when the Camp Fire struck in 2018, converting and then donating six transit buses into homes for dog owners who no longer had housing. Their mobile veterinary clinic regularly offers free spaying and neutering for animals.



Jennifer Contreras, with her pooch Zoe, worked with BADRAP to find a more affordable solution for Zoe's medical needs. (Photo courtesy of Jennifer Contreras)

The organization has years of connections and expertise working with dogs, and it offers comfort to owners when unexpected situations arise. For Contreras, this meant Reynolds telling her that heartworms are a normal affliction — despite the scary name — and connecting her with a veterinarian who was willing to perform the necessary procedures at a third of the initial cost.

Contreras primarily works with homeless people. And although she and Reynolds just met, they are already collaborating — working to figure out how best to serve people who rely on their pets for companionship, protection and survival, especially during the pandemic. In the future, to take just one example, this might mean supplying pet owners with crates to make their animals more comfortable in a shelter setting.

Reynolds expects to serve at least 300 families and individuals in upcoming weeks as the pandemic persists, and her efforts received a boost on #GivingTuesdayNow when BADRAP raised \$14,000. Most of the organization's bills go toward emergency veterinary care.

BADRAP expects to create a plan to support pets in the wake of the immediate crisis. Pet adoptions have spiked recently and many animal shelters have even been completely cleared out. Post-pandemic, BADRAP will continue its messaging focused on preventing separation anxiety for pets and proper training.

“I think we’re all a little curious about [what comes after],” Reynolds said. “We hope and expect that new adopters are bonding with their dogs well enough that they’ll seek out solutions when it’s time to go back to work.”