

## BEING A RESPONSIBLE PET OWNER

Recently, a PAWS volunteer brought a beagle named Marley to our clinic. Marley had been shot in the eye with a BB pellet. Her poor paws were frozen from exposure to the frigid temperatures. Fortunately we were able to treat Marley successfully. In spite of all the pain, suffering, and hunger she endured, Marley remains a loving, trusting pet and is flourishing in her new home. This special case caused me to reflect yet again on the wonder of letting a pet into our lives. Americans have 81.7 million cats and 72 million dogs as pets. Why?

The benefits of having a pet are numerous. Most of us are aware that having a pet can lower blood pressure. Even a few moments spent interacting with a pet relaxes us. Walking a dog gives us a reason to exercise even when frost covers the ground. Good citizen dogs and visiting dogs are a common feature in many health facilities and have a positive impact on overall wellness.

In these rapidly changing, uncertain times the media bombards us daily by reporting on acts of violence and horrific suffering. Stress levels are rising among all levels of society, including children. Too often we may find ourselves less sensitive and distant. Loving someone is getting harder, but there is one basic truth about animals: They offer us unconditional love and ask so little in return. Even when time constraints cause us to give them less time and care than they deserve, our pets remain faithful and loyal. When we are too busy for them, they are there waiting patiently beside us. As soon as we show them that we are ready and willing to love them back, they reward us with their antics and unwavering affection. Our pets restore our humanity and teach us again and again that the bond we share with them is not only emotional and physical, but therapeutic as well. Who can resist a smile and hug for the pets that await our return and rush to greet us at the end of a hard day? The love we have for them is wonderfully pure and naïve, the way we loved when we were children. Being able to keep that pristine child-like simplicity and love is the center of happiness for us all. Our pets are the reminders and guardians of the call for that. No wonder we love them so much.

I often notice the Pet Pals volunteers who offer their time to help at the shelter. It's a hard and not always pleasant job. There is cleaning to be done, cages to wash and floors to mop. Yet, when I see them glued to a cage talking and caressing one of the animals, I see in their eyes why they are here. They are here because they want to have that special moment of connection that energizes them for the rest of the day to care for the pets. The way they interact with one another reflects the kindness they garnered from that moment by the cage. That is what I call priceless.