Helping Clients Who Have Pets
Specifically for Hospital Staff and Social Service Providers

Over the last few years, we have received requests for assistance from social workers, case managers, and hospital staff who discover their clients have pets and who are not equipped care for the animals – either temporarily or permanently. What to do and where to turn for help with the pets has always been the question and we have discovered that responses vary depending upon the circumstances, the caretaker’s personal network, and unique pet needs. It is important to remember that all pets rely on their caretakers for food and sustenance and your coordination of care may be required to ensure the welfare of animals in the individual’s absence. The following information is meant serve as a guide to help your clients and their pets.

Temporary Care of Pets – Arranging for Care

Before Hospitalizations: When working with clients and a pet care issue is identified, develop an emergency plan for the animals with your client. Utilizing family, friends, neighbors, and associates, you may be able to identify helpers during a brief hospitalization or for longer periods. If no one is identified to provide care, boarding can be arranged by calling the client’s veterinarian or a local boarding facility. In New York City, costs for these services vary, but low-cost programs are available for both short and long-term. For clients who present as isolated and with limited or fixed incomes, temporary low-cost boarding may be available through referrals from Pets For Life NYC (917-468-2938). In addition, social service programs throughout the City are beginning to consider pet welfare and if the individual is already a client of an active program, they may be willing to help.

During Hospitalization: When possible, contact family, friends, next of kin, and neighbors to ensure pet care arrangements. When no other animal care can be coordinated and the person’s ability to provide care is unforeseen, you may reach out to Pets for Life NYC (917-468-2938) for boarding or contact Animal Care & Control of NYC, the City’s municipal animal shelter. To request assistance from AC&C, call 311 to reach the AC&C Call Center and complete the required documentation (Owner’s Consent for AC&C Assistance Form and AC&C Intake Release Form) requesting pet removal due to hospitalization, and fax the paperwork to (212) 442-2066. Once the signed paperwork is received, AC&C can coordinate a response. AC&C may require your assistance to secure access to the home environment to remove animals. In these cases, pets may be cared for temporarily at the AC&C Care Centers for up to seven days, but financial reimbursement is required to reclaim animals. Following the temporary hold of a week, these animals will be made available for adoption or potentially euthanized if not re-claimed.

Permanent Removal of Pets

When it becomes apparent that clients can no longer take care of their pets, it is important to discuss relinquishment options so that appropriate arrangements can be made for animals. Depending upon the pet’s age, health, and disposition – along with timing to organize a solution, options may include:

- Re-homing the pet through the owner’s private network of friends or family;
- Relinquishing the pet to a local shelter or rescue group; or
- Surrendering the pet to the local municipal shelter.

It is best if pets can remain in the same circle as the original caretaker – and the human-animal bond can continue through visitation. As a way to identify someone for this role, your client may offer a stipend or pet supplies and low-cost vet care can be coordinated through the Alliance resources. If no one is identified and timing is flexible, you may reach out to private rescue groups (listed individually as Alliance Participating Organizations on the Mayor’s Alliance for NYC’s Animals website: [www.animalalliancenyc.org](http://www.animalalliancenyc.org)). To facilitate a placement, gather identifying information on the pet (specifically the species, breed, age, color, if spayed or neutered, health issues, behavior information, and a photograph, if possible). While most NYC groups run at full capacity, a private rescue group or shelter may be able to help if the pet meets the intake criteria and the group has available space. The last resort in New York City is the municipal shelter, Animal Care & Control of NYC (AC&C). AC&C is the “open intake shelter” and required to accept all surrendered animals in New York City. However, due to space limitations, some animals may be euthanized if they are not reunited with their owners, adopted, or placed with private groups. After all other options have been explored, surrendered pets should be brought to AC&C Care Centers (for more information regarding locations and hours, review the website: [www.nycacc.org](http://www.nycacc.org)). Be advised that if you are bringing your client’s pet, you will be asked to show written proof that the owner has either relinquished the animal to you or your agency or that your agency serves as legal guardian and the court requires the pet to be removed.

Requesting AC&C to pick up animals at a home location can be coordinated as a last resort, particularly if the animal is at risk for abandonment. It is important to note that there may be financial costs for this service and you will need to make the request using the forms to Request Assistance and Pet Surrender. Your assistance may be required to secure the Pet Surrender Documentation and your agency may be required to be on-site at the time of the pet removal to ensure a smooth pet removal.