



MPA member spotlight: Jen Clarkson



In 2016, two outstanding animal welfare organizations, Dog Aide and Bark Nation, embarked on a collaborative effort called Project Grace, which offers free spay/neuter surgery for the dogs of Detroit through a voucher system.

In addition to spay/neuter surgery, Project Grace dogs get free pain and antibiotic medications, nail trimming, needed vaccinations and microchipping.

“A group of Dog Aide and Bark Nation volunteers started talking about what we could do to combat overpopulation in Detroit,” said Dog Aide Executive

Director Jen Clarkson. “Our hope was to allow these families to keep their beloved pets; therefore, eliminating the need for owners to be forced to surrender their dogs to an overburdened shelter system or rescue organization.”

Dog Aide was already providing Detroit families with free food, pet care supplies and education about how to care for their pets. The only criteria for being in the program was the dogs must be spayed or neutered. Project Grace makes that possible for those who otherwise might not be able to participate in the Dog Aide program.

More than 1,600 Detroit dogs have been helped since the inception of Project Grace.

Like most people who are involved in animal welfare, Clarkson is a lifelong animal lover. “I would bring home strays all the time,” she said. “My poor mom – when I went off to college, she was left with a houseful of rescue cats.”

Clarkson’s husband and two sons, ages 18 and 16, are also animal lovers. They share their home with two rescue dogs, a mix named Reese and a tripod named Reggie. Clarkson’s family have all volunteered with Dog Aide in multiple roles.

“At Dog Aide, it’s more than just about the dog,” Clarkson said. “It’s about the whole family unit. It makes me proud to see how our volunteers interact with people when they understand that we’re there for them and not just their pets.”

All 80-plus Dog Aide workers, including Clarkson, are unpaid volunteers, even though Clarkson says it’s like having a full-time job. Teams go out to touch base with up to 250 families monthly, talk about programs and get them enrolled after spay/neuter is complete.

The newest Dog Aide initiative is a heartworm prevention program for clients called Tyson’s Heart.

“I love the idea of being able to combat the rate of heartworm infections in the city, which is at about 50%,” Clarkson said. “It’s a huge educational program so people understand what heartworm is.”

Dog Aide has two hotlines: 313-855-5866 for Project Grace and 313-744-6364 for Dog Aide. Detroit families can call the Project Grace hotline to be mailed a voucher for a free spay/neuter at All About Animals in Warren or at Comfort Place in Livonia.

Michigan Pet Alliance member Clarkson serves on the MPA Policy & Advocacy Committee. “I serve because I value being able to be with like-minded individuals who are advocating for change,” she said.

“MPA is lucky to have Jen and Dog Aide, with such a vast knowledge and experience of feet on the ground, active community animal welfare experience, as involved members,” said MPA Board Chair Deborah Schutt. “Michigan shelters looking to launch human/animal support services through active community outreach can learn a lot from these folks who were ahead of their time, operating these programs for years before they became recognized as critical solutions by national organizations.”

Dog Aide:

<https://www.facebook.com/DogAide>

www.dogaide.com

<https://www.instagram.com/dogaide/?hl=en>

Project Grace:

<https://www.facebook.com/donate/443743150529753>

Dealing With a Diagnosis of Feline Leukemia

By Leona Foster, Founder, Leuk's Landing, Inc.

The world's sweetest kitty shows up on your doorstep or finds its way into your shelter or rescue. Given how sweet and loving it is, you are anxious to get it vetted so you can start trying to find it a great home. When the vet tests it with a combo test (FeLV, FIV and heartworm), you get some startling news ... the kitty is positive for feline leukemia or FeLV. What do you do next?



First, remain calm. It's really not as bad as you may think, especially when you hear the word “leukemia” in a diagnosis. FeLV is specific to cats only, not dogs or people. While it is contagious to other cats through swapping bodily fluids (via mating and/or mutual grooming), after a kitty is spayed or neutered the chances of transmission go way down. The reason for this is that snot and saliva dry within a matter of minutes and once they dry, the virus is dead. So, transmission occurs when a cat eats the snot or saliva of a FeLV-positive kitty. But the reality is that they usually have to eat quite a lot of those bodily fluids to become infected. Just like with COVID-19, the best way to limit the spread of feline leukemia between cats is to wash your hands. If you handle a FeLV kitty and get sneezed on, change your clothes before touching the next kitty. Housing a FeLV positive kitty separate from non-FeLV kitties is recommended unless the other kitties are up to date on a FeLV vaccination.

Second, if possible, retest after 30 days to confirm the kitty really has FeLV. Late in 2021, new standards were released (supported by AustinPetsAlive! and Maddie's Fund) that say once a kitty tests positive on an Idexx Elisa Snap test (this is the only test they make this recommendation about), consider it positive for FeLV and adopt out with the recommendation that the new owners retest to confirm the FeLV finding with another snap test or a Quantitative PCR test. In our experience, some kitties can fight this virus off over time, so one test is never enough to say they are positive. But for purposes of getting a kitty into their forever home, assuming they are positive for it and then encouraging the new owner to confirm the diagnosis, makes sense.

It's hard to believe, but there are still shelters, rescues and even vets who recommend euthanasia of a kitty that tests positive for feline leukemia, even when they are not showing any symptoms and no confirmatory testing has been done.

In a sanctuary setting, we will only take in confirmed FeLV-positive kitties. We do not

adopt out; therefore, we put the responsibility for retesting on the rescues, shelters or individuals that bring kitties to us. Over the years, we have followed up with people who requested admission and learned that sometimes the kitty was negative on FeLV because someone misread the result (kitty had FIV, not FeLV); the test kits were expired; the test kits were not handled appropriately (some kits require warming up after refrigeration); and other issues that could have resulted in euthanasia of a negative kitty without retesting.

You now have a better understanding of FeLV and what to do when a positive kitty shows up in your life or your organization. The next step is to spread the word and help educate others to understand that an FeLV diagnosis is no longer a death sentence. For information on feline leukemia, please visit leukslanding.org.



**Did you know that
Michigan is still
operating under the
Dog Law of 1919 and
there are **no cat laws?****

let's make change

Join the Michigan Pet Alliance

www.michiganpet.org

About Michigan Pet Alliance

MPA Vision:

To achieve the best quality of life for Michigan's companion animals.

MPA Mission:

To work in collaboration and speak with a single voice to eliminate abuse and neglect of Michigan's companion animals and to save all healthy and treatable homeless companion animals through training, technical assistance, education, and advocacy.

For more information:

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michiganpet.org

Michigan Pet Alliance is a 501(c)(3) charitable organization as defined by the IRS (EIN 20-0399162) and is a Guidestar Exchange Platinum Participant.



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