February 2025 Member Spotlight: Dog Aide

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

Project Grace dogs get free antibiotics and pain medications, nail trims, needed vaccinations and microchipping as well.

There are, of course, no income or breed restrictions.

"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 2,400 Detroit dogs have been helped since the inception of **Project Grace**, which now additionally partners with Friends of Detroit Animal Care and Control.

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 20 and 18, are also animal lovers. They have long shared their home with rescue dogs, and Clarkson's family members have all volunteered with Dog Aide in multiple roles.

“At Dog Aide, it’s about more than just 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 Clarkston, 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 request a voucher by mail for a free spay/neuter at All About Animals (also an MPA member) 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 as involved members, with such a vast knowledge and experience of feet on the ground and active community animal welfare experience,” said MPA Immediate Past Chair and Founder Deborah Schutt. “Michigan shelters that want to launch human/animal support services through active community outreach can learn a lot from these folks. They were ahead of their time, operating these programs for years before they became recognized as critical solutions by national organizations.”

Join Dog Aide in its mission to support Detroit dog owners and their dogs by providing underserved families with access to resources, care and the assistance they need to keep their pets safe, happy and healthy in their homes.

Follow Dog Aide and its life-saving initiatives at: