

To whom it may concern,

My name is Georgia Smith. I am a Community Health Worker in Lincoln County. I work for Northwest Coastal Housing. I am part of the resources that are offered to Lincoln County residents living in our shelter, Coastal Phoenix Rising. As a Community Health Worker, I am in direct contact with clients, their families, pets and needs. My job is to assist them in overcoming the barriers that lead to a healthy, happy and housed life.

Here at Northwest Coastal Housing, we allow clients to be in shelter with their pet companions. We are one of the only housing organizations that welcomes pets. We currently have 11 dogs housed in our 38 room shelter. We are continuously adding resources and offering programs. Our latest project has been brainstorming how we can offer more assistance to, not just the families, but the dogs as well. Dogs have needs. Those needs include nutrition, veterinary visits, vaccinations, registration, exercise, appropriate places to use the restroom and obedience training. When those needs are met, the benefits to including a dog as part of your family nurture mental health, physical health and positive decision making skills. It is my job to assist families in knowing how to help their pet so that their pet can help them.

You may have heard people say that "homeless people should not have pets." People having pets can not be controlled. The solution is not to take away people's pets. Even if you did, you would be taking animals and placing them in vet clinics to receive basic services and then trying to get them housed. That is what we are doing without creating trauma by removing a pet from the home. Shelters like ours are using community partners and resources to get family pets the care and housing they need. We need the funds to do great work.

I have been starting conversations with Oceanlake Veterinary Clinic, Camp Canines and our local animal shelters and societies. My plan is to require clients with pets to begin the vaccination and licensing process when they arrive at shelter. For the short time that they are housed with us, I want to provide access to dog training workshops that are held on site. Within three months, the pets will have a health and basic obedience certificate. Northwest Coastal Housing is also conversing about creating appropriate dog areas for play and potty. The outcome of providing these services will result in a larger number of families homed with pets. One of our largest barriers to housing is not that someone has a pet. We can write a letter for that. It is that the pets they do have are not meeting the criteria for a reasonable accommodation. By partnering with other organizations that specialize in dog health and training, we are overcoming the health, obedience and housing barriers.

These services and partnerships cost money. The investment is worth the benefits of mental health, healthy animals and safer spaces. We owe it to our local animal services to stay productive and compensated. We owe it to the community workers to stay safe while entering people's and pet's personal spaces. We owe it to the homeless pet owners as they practice care in decision making, selfless acts of providing, mental health companionship, and a feeling of traumaless safety.

These conversations remind me of two clients I have worked with recently. Both of them are pet owners. Both of them are female. Both of them were living in a tent and their vehicle. The first client was reluctant and refused medical treatment because she feared losing her pet. We were able to get her into a shelter that allowed animals. We were able to find a pet sitter while she went to the hospital. Today, only a few months later, she is sheltered, applying for

housing, making her medical appointments, a licensed driver and working a full time job. The second client was not able to be housed in a pet accepting facility. The shelter was full. Her other option was to find a foster home for her pet or abandon the pet. She could not do that. Her pet was the only loving being that she had in her life. She had suffered abuse and multiple miscarriages before leaving her partner. She took with her only the basics, most important things, and her pet. Today, she is unreachable, not in a program and not in a shelter.

People will have pets. It is our responsibility to provide them with the aid and services they need and to treat their pets as the companions and family members they are. The pets deserve the services. Our communities deserve these services. For that reason, I am ethically, emotionally and work appropriately asking you to please assist Oregon homeless families, their pets, and community workers with 6 million dollars towards resources.

Thank you,
Georgia Smith