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Michele and Agnese Cestone Foundation Awards Grant to AWA

July 5, 2018- Voorhees, N.J. - (AWA) Animal Welfare Association was awarded a \$15,000 grant from the Michele and Agnese Cestone Foundation to support shelter diversion and retention activities. Funds will assist shelter staff in their efforts to *Educate, Engage and Enrich* the community and keep pets inside their homes.

The *Engage, Educate and Enrich* diversion program consists of a variety of tactics that are aimed at keeping companion animals out of shelters. These tactics include a call center hotline, community education programs, humane education programs, and a pet pantry that provides free pet food to owners.

“These programs are designed to teach people of all ages compassion, respect and empathy for all living creatures as well as strengthen the human-animal bond,” said Katie Ritter, Volunteer and Outreach Coordinator.

AWA’s goal of keeping companion animals from entering the shelter is expensive and labor intensive. The shelter staff works hard towards providing community members and pets owners with the necessary resources to handle medical/behavior concerns that may cause them to relinquish their pets to the shelter.

“Staff travels outside of the shelter into the community to speak to students in surrounding schools about proper treatment and safety around animals. This helps them better understand pets within their own homes from a young age,” said Sophia Barrett, Special Events and Community Programs Manager.

According to the ASPCA, pet problems are the primary reason that owners need to rehome their pets. This accounts for 47% of rehomed dogs and 42% of rehomed cats. Problems consisted of pets growing too large, aggressive behaviors and health problems, which owners felt they were not equipped to handle. However, many behaviors and medical issues can be corrected with proper training and treatment provided by AWA’s pet care resources.

Pet owners that have more support provided to them are less likely to relinquish their pet. The shelter staff continues to expand their programs and find new strategies to educate the surrounding community.

To learn more about AWA’s lifesaving programs, visit www.awanj.org/programs.

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AWA Animal Welfare Association, a private, non-profit, 501(c) 3 animal welfare organization, serves the people and animals of southern New Jersey. AWA is dedicated to eliminating animal suffering, promoting the importance of the human-animal bond, and improving the role of animals in the well-being of people. Through a variety of programs including adoptions, veterinary services, pet therapy, and humane education, in 2017 over 23,000 pets were served through AWA programming. AWA is South Jersey's leader in progressive companion animal care.



