

Lifting Them Up

An AT&T staffer wants to reach out and comfort someone—in your shelter

BY SHEVAUN BRANNIGAN

It's a problem many shelter staff are all too familiar with. They try to keep the kennels as warm and pleasant as possible, but cold, hard floors—which allow for sanitation but aren't pleasant to curl up on—aren't exactly conducive to a good night's sleep.

That's the problem Tracey Robinson set out to fix.

Like many private citizens, Robinson wanted to help homeless pets but didn't know how. "So I'd make my ... monetary donations now and again. But at some point in 2008, I decided that I really needed to be more active for myself. And I set up a nonprofit and sort of figured that I'd learn what I needed to do as I go."

Robinson formed her nonprofit, Animal Rescue Aid (ARA) in 2008. In her full-time job as a senior product manager for AT&T, she had access to "cool, very fun [and] cutting-edge products" which occasionally got discarded or recycled. From time to time, she was able to donate such goods to shelters and rescue groups so that they could use them in silent auctions or other fundraising efforts.

A few years later, after reading articles describing the difficulty shelters and rescue groups had providing beds for the animals in their care, she was inspired to start ARA's bed donation program. At around the same time, she read an article about an Arizona woman who fundraised tens of thousands of dollars for donations of 425 Kuranda beds to her local animal care and control facility. Robinson was amazed at the work—but also amazed at how few beds the money had bought. She knew Kuranda made terrific beds, but she worried the costs—\$49 for the basic model—might deter donors.

Being the solution-oriented person she is, Robinson didn't give up. She took her research a step further, and contacted a Chinese manufacturer of elevated pet beds directly to investigate—and negotiate. She settled on an elevated bed made of rustproof aluminum and PVC-coated canvas, and got a price that seemed more workable. "So at the



Jake, a Staffordshire mix awaiting adoption at Almost Home Animal Rescue, rests easy on his bed, which keeps him up off the cold floor.

end of the day, long story short ... basically I can bring the beds in directly at the cost of \$15 per bed, and that would be delivered to the shelter itself."

Robinson promotes this donation program through ARA's website, and it's been a major hit. Erin Schuch of Almost Home Animal Rescue, located in Michigan, says that when the dogs get their beds, "they get so excited, then get right on it and curl up and lie down. You can see a sense of contentment on their face." And the dogs aren't the only fans: "When I found out how many were donated, I literally stopped and cried I was so happy," Schuch says.

The number of beds that went to Almost Home? An outstanding 147.

Robinson stresses that providing a bed does more than give the animals a good place to sleep. "It gives them a chance to be adopted." An animal who's more comfortable and less stressed is more likely to show her true personality when potential adopters come by.

Lady's Hope, a Washington state-based rescue, raises money to help shelters in rural

areas purchase pet beds. Yvonne Deveraux, the group's founder, has seen the way dogs at some shelters end up sleeping. "Imagine lying on a cold, hard, concrete floor, dirty with feces or urine, with no relief or escape from the draining cold," says Deveraux. She notes that one of her dogs "was showing signs of stress ... and since he received his bed, he is much quieter and less stressed now."

The beds not only improve comfort levels, they're also easy to clean—disinfectant and water is all you need, says Robinson.

She'd like to be able to devote herself to ARA full time, "because that's where my heart is," she says. In the meantime, she's taking it one order at a time.

At press time, 39 shelters and rescue groups were participating, and more than 500 beds had been donated. Robinson will also be attending the 2011 Animal Care Expo in Orlando, Fla. Visit animalrescueaid.org for more information. 