Companions in Crisis

How one charity helps unhoused
pet owners get a leg up

By EMILY O'BRIEN

BEING UNHOUSED offers its own fair share of difficulties—especially when you have a furry friend in tow. Most shelters for unhoused individuals prohibit pets, which means pet owners facing a housing crisis are left to choose between surrendering their animal or finding a different place to sleep. Oftentimes this means camping in a park or their car if they own one.

Fortunately, Annie & Millie's Place is stepping in. The nonprofit aims to keep pets and their parents together—no matter the circumstance—by equipping people who are experiencing homelessness with pet-friendly programs and resources.
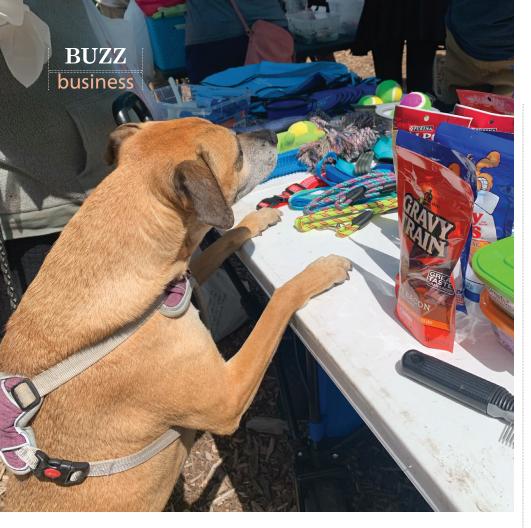
They offer several avenues of aid.

First, they provide basic pet supplies, such as food and gear. They also partner with the Street Dog Coalition, which hosts complimentary veterinary care clinics for those affected by homelessness and their pets. Annie & Millie's Place will cover the cost of urgent or emergency veterinary care for crises through a grant received from the Cold Noses Foundation.

Partnerships with HOPE for Longmont and Dee-O-Gee pet supply and daycare also allow Annie & Millie's Place to sponsor a few days of doggie daycare for unhoused pet owners who need to attend appointments or go to work.

For people who are unable to provide care to their pets, due to circumstances like hospitalization or short-term incarceration, the organization also provides pet foster care services.

Kristen Baltrum, the founder and Executive Director of Annie & Millie's Place, firmly believes in using advocacy and education platforms to share her story. She aims to underscore the significance of human-animal bonds and their positive impact on individuals and communities.

"We believe that 'togetherness,' both for the human-animal duo in

Baltrum explains there was never a time when it wasn't hard for her family to watch Annie and Millie navigate that situation. "There is a fine line between enabling and empowering, and we constantly had to make a choice about how much we could support them," says Baltrum.

It was not until the tragic event of Annie taking her own life that Baltrum came to a profound realization—Millie had been a constant source of unwavering support to Annie, faithfully accompanying her throughout their shared journey, even when others could not.

"Right or wrong, the companionship and love Millie gave Annie were unfaltering," she says. "Now I cannot look at someone with their pet without seeing the love that Millie and Annie had for each other."

Speaking of the people she encounters at her organization, she says, "It's clear to me that the animal that travels with them is their family, their purpose, their constant companion. Over and over again, I see how the person cares for their animal before caring for themselves."

Moving forward, Baltrum hopes to partner with a shelter and become a "satellite shelter" for the pets who are not permitted. "We will run the pet program and co-shelter space, while the primary shelter continues their human-centric work. Again, it is truly about partnership."

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circumstances of homelessness and in partnerships with businesses and organizations, is the best way to navigate difficulties," Baltrum says. "Each partner brings their best to the problem and together we find solutions."

The organization's name honors Baltrum's deceased sister, Annie, who faced her own housing crisis, which was only made more complex when she did not want to separate from her dog, Millie.

Baltrum observed that Annie faced increased difficulties in tasks like finding shelter, making appointments and maintaining her job due to the presence of Millie.

"I thought the easy solution was for her to surrender Millie, which would give Millie a safe home and Annie the access to the resources she needed," Baltrum says. When she asked Annie to give up her dog, her response was a firm "no." She felt that they needed each other and said she'd never give her up.