

THE "BREEDER ASSISTANCE PROGRAM" & FOOD PANTRY

Over the past several months, since taking on the "Breeder Assistance Program" (BAP) "Chairperson" position, I have found that there is a substantial amount of misunderstanding about what the "BAP" is and what it does. Over the next several months, through a series of articles, I hope to clear up some of these misconceptions. Once the misconceptions are eliminated, we will turn to addressing some of the issues that can cause problems, that require BAP assistance to begin with and then some ways on how to possibly avoid them.

With that in mind, I think it is probably best to take this opportunity to review the "basic" description of the programs, along with a bit of their history. Below, is a very general description of what the "Breeder Assistance Program" and "Food Pantry" programs are. Future articles will expand on these...

THE BREEDER ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

The CFA "Breeder Assistance Program" (BAP) was created to help CFA breeders and their catteries, in a time of need. It was developed as a bridge, to span the gap between the Animal Welfare and Breed Rescue programs. Unlike other types of assistance programs, the BAP is intended to provide the "assistance" necessary to a breeder / cattery to get them through a particular situation and then, whenever possible, to allow them to continue on with their breeding program, after the assistance is provided and the situation over. This is a major difference from any other program out there. As such, with the exception of some very specific situations, the BAP does NOT require that a breeder / cattery close down (spay, neuter all their cats, adopt them out, etc.) in order to receive assistance.

The reasons for assistance from the BAP are many, but the majority of them are based on situations that occur, which are beyond the control of the breeder involved. While our primary mission is to help breeders / catteries through times of trouble and allow them to continue on afterwards, we can also provide assistance in helping to shrink, or close down a breeding program / cattery, in a measured and responsible manner, when the appropriate time comes.

Reasons for assistance requests can include, but are not limited to:

- Temporary loss of home / Acts of Nature
- Personal Family Situations (divorce, loss of job, etc)
- Cases of Illness, Temporary or Permanent Disability
- Normal Retirement
- Number of Cats beyond care capacity
- Death - without provisions for the animals

The single most important aspect of our program is - CONFIDENTIALITY. The assistance we provide is done so, in the strictest of confidence, with compassion to the individuals involved and with the well-being of the people and cats, foremost in our minds. We are here to provide "assistance", when requested, to those who need it. Can we help everyone? Sadly, no - There are simply some situations we can do very little about. Will we do everything in our power to do all we can to assist, when requested? Absolutely, YES!!

Every "case" and every situation presented to us, is handled on an individual basis and the assistance provided, is specific to each particular situation. It can be as simple as providing an "ear" - someone to talk to about a particular problem, all the way up through providing guidance, possibly people and the tools necessary, to "catch up" with and correct, an out of control situation. i.e., We want to help keep things from escalating beyond the point where you, or someone you know and care about, can deal with on their own.

In order for the BAP to work in the way it was intended, "you" need to ask for help. "You" have to provide the information necessary to allow us to do the best job we can to assist you. We know it can be very hard, we know it is often extremely difficult to admit to needing help, but we can not guess at who needs it, nor can we help provide the appropriate assistance, without accurate, honest information about the situation and what is needed.

You can contact the BAP Chairperson, directly, or your BAP Regional Coordinator -- whichever gives you the greatest comfort level you need, in asking for help.

If you, or another breeder you know, needs help with their cats, please do not hesitate to contact us!

FOOD PANTRY

The "Food Pantry" became an off-shoot of the BAP, after it became abundantly clear that some sort of "food bank" was desperately needed to provide for most of the assistance being requested. The "food bank", initially developed in the Midwest Region (Region 6) and primarily relied on "food drives" (collections) at cat shows, to collect the food it used in the program.

Even in just one Region, it did not take long for the "logistics" of cat show food drives, to become a nightmare and as the need for food spread throughout the country, those nightmares were going to quickly become all but insurmountable. A different process was needed.

With the very generous assistance of Royal Canin, who provided donations of their overstock product, the food bank was finally able to receive and maintain a sufficient amount of food, in one place, to service the entire Region. Within short order, it became equally clear, that the program needed to (and could) expand to cover the entire country and with the continued support of Royal Canin, the national "Food Pantry" program was born!!

In those first years, the Food Pantry sent out hundreds of shipments and many thousands of pounds of food to people who found themselves in desperate need and requested assistance through the BAP. During this time, Royal Canin's assistance grew ever larger and incoming shipments of 5,000 lbs of food at a time, were not uncommon. With this support, the Food Pantry was even able to expand it's assistance to groups outside of CFA - to shelters, sanctuaries and other organizations who cared for abandoned cats. The goodwill it helped to create, was immeasurable.

Early in 2009, as the US economy depressed and changes in production and scheduling at Royal Canin took effect, the overstock food previously being provided, began to dry up. Just as people needed the Food Pantry the most, it's ability to serve them, became severely limited. Local companies, in the area around where the Food Pantry warehouse is located, were pressed for donations and we have been able to maintain and ship out, absolute "emergency" food supplies, but nothing near to what we used to be able to do.

Today, the Food Pantry, though severely limited on how much food it has on hand, is still very much in place and active. In conjunction with our local efforts at collecting food, we are working on several alternative means to provide the direct food assistance, so many need.

In future "articles", I will address some of the questions I frequently get, but more importantly, discuss what programs we are putting into effect, to help meet the ever growing need for help and what you can do to assist.

Thank you.

John Bierrie

BAP - Chairleg