



**Using Community-Led
Care Models to Support
California Pets and
Their Families**

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Grant Gives Hope to the
SF SPCA Community
Veterinary Clinic**

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Our Animals

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Cover models: Melissa Gómez and Nathaniel Garcia with SF SPCA Alum, Daisy
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The San Francisco Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals

201 Alabama Street, San Francisco, CA 94103 | (415) 554-3000
Founded April 18, 1868

Our Mission

Our mission is to ensure every companion animal has access to quality medical care, compassionate shelter, and a loving home.

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CEO's Message:



The nationwide veterinarian shortage presents an opportunity to rethink how care is delivered, ensuring pets and their families receive the support they deserve. By addressing barriers, including cost, transportation, cultural competency, and language, we can create a more inclusive system that meets the needs of diverse communities. These efforts will make veterinary care more accessible and help keep animals in their own loving homes, easing the burden on shelters.

The San Francisco SPCA Community Ambassador Program—launched thanks, in part, to a generous grant from Maddie’s Fund—is our newest initiative supporting pets and their people who don’t have access to affordable care. In this issue of *Our Animals*, you’ll learn how Community Ambassadors are transforming former veterinary deserts in both San Francisco and the Central Valley to reduce—if not end—animal homelessness and shelter overpopulation in these areas.

You’ll meet SF SPCA Community Workforce Manager Melissa Gómez, who also serves as the Community Ambassador for San Francisco. We’ll share how a transformational grant from PetSmart Charities helps us expand access to care at our Community Veterinary Clinic. Community members also share tales of their beloved pets, and you’ll learn how a sweet pup named Marshall, who spent more than a year with us, finally found his forever home.

We’re so grateful to funders, including Maddie’s Fund, PetSmart Charities, and every donor, volunteer, and community member who stands with us. Thank you for being there with us for our animals.

Jennifer Scarlett, DVM
CEO

Using Community-Led Care Models to Support California Pets and Their Families



SF SPCA Community Engagement Coordinator and local Community Ambassador Ben Muñoz holds puppies ready for vaccinations during a Mobile Vaccine Clinic in Stockton.

The San Francisco SPCA Community Ambassador Program is an initiative designed to meet pet guardians where they are—both literally and figuratively. Inspired by human healthcare models that prioritize local relationships and accessibility, the program takes a community-led approach to expanding veterinary care in San Francisco, Stockton, and other parts of California's Central Valley. By training trusted community members as ambassadors, we are working to ensure that more pets receive lifesaving care and to reshape how veterinary services reach the families who need them most.

Veterinary care can be out of reach for many pet guardians in under-resourced communities (places where no veterinary services are available nearby). The SF SPCA Community Ambassadors are here to change that. These individuals are deeply connected to the neighborhoods they serve, providing outreach, sharing critical information, and administering basic treatments like vaccines and flea prevention. Their work will directly impact the health and well-being of thousands of animals, keeping beloved pets healthy and with their families while also reducing the number of animals entering shelters.

How Community Ambassadors expand access to veterinary care

In many communities across California's Central Valley, accessing veterinary care isn't just about finding a clinic—it's about navigating a web of systemic barriers. Transportation, cost, and a lack of trust in available services often prevent pet guardians from getting the care their animals need. But solutions don't always come from the top down. Instead, real change can be driven by people within their own communities—neighbors helping neighbors.

This idea became a reality when the Community Ambassador Program launched in 2024, funded, in part, by Maddie's Fund, a national family foundation established by Dave and Cheryl Duffield to revolutionize the status and well-being of companion animals. The program kicked off in San Francisco's Excelsior District and Earlimart—a rural, unincorporated community in Tulare County. Both areas are historically under-resourced, with high rates of disease and animals surrendered to shelters. "The Community Ambassador Program is changing how we can partner with communities to transform the accessibility of veterinary care," said Amy Zeifang, from Maddie's Fund Executive Leadership Team. "Community Ambassadors will expand not only *how* care is provided, but importantly, *who* provides care."

This program is a grassroots initiative that empowers local leaders to connect pet guardians with basic veterinary care. Ambassadors are more than just liaisons; they are community members, trusted by their neighbors, and deeply familiar with their communities' challenges. By embedding veterinary outreach within the fabric of these neighborhoods, they make care more accessible—one conversation, one relationship, and one pet at a time.

Melissa Gómez, who grew up in San Francisco's Mission and Excelsior districts, is the SF SPCA Community Workforce Manager and local Community Ambassador. "After training, Community Ambassadors can administer the DAPP vaccine for dogs, flea treatments, and dewormer," she said. "We sign

people up for subsidized spay and neuter, help book veterinary appointments, and offer bags of food, collars, leashes, and muzzles, which are sometimes required for dogs entering homeless shelters."

Listening to the community, learning from experience

When the SF SPCA first expanded its efforts to improve access to care in the Central Valley, transportation to veterinary care was anticipated to be a challenge—but it proved even more significant than expected. This quickly became clear to our Community Ambassadors, who, through their deep-rooted connections, identified transportation as one of the most urgent barriers facing pet guardians.

One such case involved a pet guardian in Tulare County caring for 13 chihuahuas, none of whom were spayed or neutered. Due to his poor health and inability

By training trusted community members as ambassadors, we are working to ensure that more pets receive lifesaving care and to reshape how veterinary services reach the families who need them most.



SF SPCA Community Ambassadors visit a home in Tulare County.

to reach veterinary care, his precious pack had grown far beyond his original intent. Unable to travel to a clinic, he faced an overwhelming situation that could have quickly spiraled further. He reached out to Tulare County Animal Services for help, which kicked off a relationship with our Community Ambassadors. Their involvement ensured he received the assistance he needed—not just in securing spay/neuter services, but in feeling supported rather than judged.

Tulare County Animal Services Manager Cassie Heffington looks forward to measuring the impact on her municipal shelter. “Success would mean a reduction in shelter intake, service calls, bite calls, and loose dogs—and therefore, a reduction in shelter euthanasia.” With these milestones in sight, the SF SPCA is confident we’ll be able to expand the program into more San Francisco and Central Valley communities and provide inspiration for shelters and animal-welfare organizations nationwide.

Trust and representation matter

Many pet guardians in under-resourced areas want veterinary care for their animals but feel discouraged or uncertain about where to turn. Some fear judgment over their circumstances, while others have had negative past experiences with institutions that don’t fully understand their challenges. Community Ambassadors bridge

SF SPCA Community Ambassadors are more than just liaisons; they are community members, trusted by their neighbors, and deeply familiar with their communities’ challenges.



SF SPCA Community Ambassadors Carrie Morales (L) and Casey Funk (R) help spread the word in Tulare County.

this gap by being both trusted neighbors and informed guides to help animal guardians navigate their options without fear or hesitation.

Because they are from the very neighborhoods they serve, these ambassadors understand the cultural and logistical realities at play. They share the same lived experiences as those they assist, making it easier to have honest conversations about pet care, financial constraints, and available resources. This peer-to-peer trust is essential in breaking down barriers that traditional outreach efforts often struggle to overcome.

A grassroots network of support transforms a former veterinary desert

Word-of-mouth remains one of the most powerful tools for spreading awareness, and Community Ambassadors are active participants in the everyday lives of their neighborhoods. Whether at local markets, community centers, or neighborhood gatherings, they share information about affordable veterinary services, upcoming clinics, and emergency pet-care options. Their visibility ensures that when an animal guardian faces a crisis, they know where to turn.



Tulare County Animal Care & Adoptions



Tulare County Supervisors Larry Micari (L) and Amy Shuklian (R) attend a Mobile Vaccine Clinic in Visalia.



SF SPCA Chief Medical Officer Dr. Jena Valdez conducts a home visit in Earlimart—a rural unincorporated area in Tulare County.

Carrie Morales, who was born and raised in Tulare County, is a Community Ambassador in her hometown of Earlimart. She shared that news of the program is traveling among families and neighbors. “It’s really nice to see how word gets around in this small town,” she said. “We met with one family and started with vaccinations and then spay and neuter. They told their cousins, and we got their animals vaccinated. Then we learned their neighbor has a cat-population problem. Now we’re getting those cats fixed.”

Through this grassroots approach, veterinary care is no longer an inaccessible service located miles away—it has become a shared community effort built on relationships and mutual support. The work of these ambassadors proves that solutions don’t just come from institutions; they come from within the community itself. And as they continue to lead the way, more pets and their families are getting the care they need, when and where they need it most. 🐾

If you would like to help us improve access to veterinary care with Community Ambassadors and our other Community Medicine programs, visit sfspca.org to donate or volunteer.

Making a Difference: Bringing Veterinary Care to Where It's Needed Most

MELISSA GÓMEZ

Community Workforce Manager,
San Francisco Community Ambassador

How long have you worked at the SF SPCA?

I've been here since April 2024.

Do you have pets?

I adopted Daisy, my soul dog, from the SF SPCA. She's a German Shepherd Pitbull mix. I also have two cats: Yoshi, whom I found at a construction site, and Misty, whom I adopted from the SF SPCA.

What one word embodies the SF SPCA for you?

Connection.

What led you to a career in animal welfare at the SF SPCA?

I've had many, many pets growing up, and I wanted to work with animals, but it didn't happen at first. I have a background in tech and also nonprofits, which is what really matters to me. I worked in housing rights, helping single-room-occupancy tenants.

I'm also a San Francisco native. I grew up in the neighborhoods we're serving, so when I saw the notification about this job, I thought, "Wow! They're looking for someone who knows the city, speaks Spanish, and is passionate about helping animals." It really resonated with me.



Melissa Gómez shows off her dog, Daisy.

What's a typical day like for you at the SF SPCA?

I oversee the Community Ambassador Program. I train every Community Ambassador, and I'm also a Community Ambassador in San Francisco myself. So, I have two different "typical" days. One is my outreach day, which is out in the community, walking all day, offering vaccinations and treatments, and talking with people. I also help people learn about the resources available to them. Some people just need to learn about what's out there, and that's enough.

My other "typical" day is administrative. From my first day, I started building the Community Ambassador playbook. It talks about how to engage with each community, how to vaccinate animals, what vaccinations do, and more. I also collect and enter our community data for Central Valley and San Francisco, for example, how many vaccines we're doing there versus in San Francisco every month. I connect with partner organizations and bring new people on board.

How does our focus on access to care impact your work?

This program helps people as much as it helps animals. We're adding another level of access to care for people who might



GI♥ING DAY 4.18

Our birthday wish? **Saving More CA Animals**

On April 18, we're dedicating our birthday to helping dogs and cats in times of crisis here in California—whether it's a wildfire, earthquake, or flood—and to do that, we've set up an emergency fund. With your help, we'll have the resources we need to provide shelter space and medical care to every animal that comes through our doors, no matter the circumstances.

Donate today at
sfspca.org/givingday2025

Your donation will be matched, up to \$300,000, to support our furry friends when they need it most.



not be able to make it to our clinics. Maybe they physically can't get there. Maybe they can't afford to take the bus. This program gives everyone equal opportunity to care for their pets by getting these services right in their home. Providing services in people's languages, like Spanish, helps provide another level of access to care.

What else do you want people to know about the SF SPCA?

I think people should know we're committed to making veterinary care more accessible, and the Community Ambassador Program is a big part of that. 🐾

PetSmart Charities Grant Gives Hope to the SF SPCA Community Veterinary Clinic



The SF SPCA Community Veterinary Clinic at Santa Rosa and Mission in the Excelsior District provides basic animal care to residents.

On any given day, you can walk through the doors of the San Francisco SPCA Community Veterinary Clinic and be greeted by smiling faces, wagging tails, and a lively symphony of overlapping languages—Spanish, English, and Cantonese.

Established in 2022 in the heart of the city's Excelsior District, it's the city's first stand-alone, low-cost veterinary clinic. Serving mostly Latinx and Asian populations, we offer care provided by staff who reflect and understand the communities we serve. "What's exciting about the community clinic," said SF SPCA Chief Medical Officer Dr. Jena Valdez, "is that our staff is from the community. They look like the community, and they speak the languages used in the neighborhood. It's a completely different take on traditional veterinary care, and it works."

Services include vaccinations, flea and tick treatments, deworming, basic examinations and sick care, and assistance with subsidized appointments at our spay and neuter clinic and veterinary hospital. It's the kind of basic veterinary care that helps keep pets in their loving homes and prevents costly emergency visits for treatable issues.

Funders like PetSmart Charities help fuel our Community Medicine Programs

In the current fiscal year, 55% of SF SPCA revenue will be contributed by our donors: individuals, foundations, companies, and those who have generously included us in their estate plans. Our ability to improve access to veterinary care is linked directly to donor support for our programs.

PetSmart Charities has supported the SF SPCA since 1998. Last year, PetSmart Charities welcomed the SF SPCA into its multi-year Accelerator grant program, designed to help expand nonprofit, low-cost, financially sustainable veterinary clinics and improve access to veterinary care. In November 2024, PetSmart Charities awarded the SF SPCA a three-year, \$1 million commitment to support the Community Veterinary Clinic's continued growth. As part of the Accelerator program, we meet monthly to share ideas and best practices with fellow awardees who are opening similar community clinics across the country.

"The San Francisco SPCA's Community Veterinary Clinic demonstrates how accessible veterinary care can transform communities," says Aimee Christian, PetSmart Charities Lead Community Grants Manager. "By meeting pet families where they are and providing high-quality, low-cost services, the SF SPCA team is breaking down barriers to care and keeping pets and their people together."

The SF SPCA Community Veterinary Clinic serves growing demand for animal care

As we work toward a financially sustainable model, donor funds will be instrumental to the CVC's continued success in expanding access to affordable veterinary care in San Francisco. Since the clinic opened, the response from pet guardians has been overwhelmingly positive, and the clinic has doubled its hours of operation to keep up with demand.

We've seen a similar increase in demand throughout our Community Medicine Programs. At our free, monthly Mobile Vaccine Clinic, we serve 60% more pets monthly than in previous years, and we regularly refer clients to the Community Veterinary Clinic. They also receive referrals from our Community Ambassador Program.

Angela Harris and her son, Nagail Tobie, from the Bayview neighborhood, bring their two cats, Sylvester and Garfield, and their dog, Penny, to the Community Veterinary Clinic. Angela said the low prices allow her to keep her pets up to date on their vaccines. Just as important, Angela and Nagail have shared that they both appreciate how warm and welcoming the clinic feels. Their ongoing relationship with our veterinary-care team ensures that Sylvester,



The Community Veterinary Clinic is open four days a week.

Garfield, and Penny will live longer, healthier lives with their loving humans.

Providing care where it's needed most

Before the Community Veterinary Clinic opened, San Francisco's Excelsior District and adjacent neighborhoods were considered a veterinary desert, with no accessible veterinary clinics or other pet resources. When the clinic

opened, residents welcomed the addition. Maribel Ramirez, resident and executive director of Excelsior Action Group, said, "It's wonderful to have such an amazing organization provide the services our neighbors, families, and friends need."

As veterinary care becomes increasingly out of reach for many residents, new care-delivery models are needed now more than ever. By prioritizing affordable pricing, staff who are representative of the community we serve, and a judgment-free approach, programs like the Community Veterinary Clinic—and all our Community Medicine initiatives—make care more accessible, save lives, and help more pets remain in their loving homes. 🐾

By meeting pet families where they are and providing high-quality, low-cost services, the SF SPCA team is breaking down barriers to care and keeping pets and their people together.

If you'd like to support programs like the Community Veterinary Clinic and Community Ambassadors, contact Madeleine Crow at mcrow@sfsPCA.org to learn more.

After a Full Year in the Shelter, Marshall Becomes a Foster Fail



Marshall enjoying some much needed splash-time.

When an animal comes to our shelter, they find themselves in a place where they'll be safe, warm, healthy, and loved until the day they're adopted—no matter how long it takes. In the case of happy, huggable Marshall, that wait turned out to be more than a year.

Crowned the “snuggle king” by our staff and volunteers, Marshall came to us with the boundless energy of a young dog who's full of smarts. The team quickly discovered his love of silly antics, chasing balls, and anything chewy. Throughout the year, Marshall enjoyed sleepovers at foster volunteers Gabe's and Rochelle's quiet home in Alameda County. In November, he celebrated his birthday at the shelter. He bounced with joy along with some of his favorite friends, played with toys, and enjoyed a tasty birthday treat (complete with a candle and “Happy Birthday” serenade).

The best birthday present ever

But Marshall's best birthday present was yet to come. After Gabe and Rochelle hosted the pup's seventh sleepover in their home, they realized this loving boy belonged in their family for good. “He's so happy, like...all the time!” said Rochelle.

Looking for your pet soulmate?

If you're ready to welcome a furry friend into your heart, look no further than the SF SPCA. Visit sfspca.org/adoptions to meet our dogs, cats, puppies, and kittens who can't wait to find their forever homes. 🐾



Are you our secret admirer?

We'd like to thank you for making the SF SPCA a part of your estate plans by inviting you to attend our Legacy Society Tea on May 30 at the Palace Hotel in San Francisco.

Please contact June Hom at
(415) 430-3251 or jhom@sfspca.org
by May 5th, to attend this special event.
sfspca.org/legacy



Join us for the 3rd Annual

ANIMAL ADVOCACY DAY

APRIL 29, 2025

cosponsored by



Date: Tuesday, April 29, 2025

Time: 9am–4pm

Where: Sacramento, California

This inspiring event unites animal advocates, state lawmakers, and animal-welfare leaders from across California for a day of action at the State Capitol. Animal Advocacy Day raises awareness about legislative efforts to help address critical access-to-care issues and veterinary shortages in California.

Visit sfspca.org/advocacyday to RSVP.

Thank you to The Barbara Wolfe Advocacy Fund for helping to make this work possible.

Celebrating the Human-Animal Bond

No matter who you are, a pet's love warms your heart, opens your mind, and enriches your life. Here, our donors, staff, adopters, and volunteers share the furry friends who fill their hearts and homes with joy.

Carrie and foster kitten Baguette

San Francisco SPCA Community Ambassador

Baguette is one of my foster fails. I treated her for ringworm, which is a lot of bathing and meds, but worth it. Most of my fosters are abandoned kittens and puppies that I've picked up from the orchards or streets in my hometown of Earlimart and nearby. Fostering has enhanced my life by connecting me with my community and by being able to make a difference for a problem that sometimes feels overwhelming. I learn something new with every animal I foster. Obviously, I can't take them all in, but with each foster, I feel I'm doing my part and changing an animal's life for the better



Ron and Jaxon

Adopter and Legacy Society Member

After my dog Rocco tragically died, I was devastated, but I reminded myself there are a lot of dogs who need homes. Knowing my situation, the team at SF SPCA presented Jaxon to me. The match was perfect. Like all dogs, Jaxon is a model of unconditional love. He also demonstrates two qualities that I admire and do my best to emulate: 1) When you fall down, get back up, shake it off, and go on, and 2) When loved ones come home, always run to greet them. Jaxon motivates me to stay active with 2-mile walks daily. He's also very entertaining and makes me laugh.

Shelby and Biscotti

Donor and Hospital Client

Biscotti is a Bernedoodle who came to live with us five years ago. Initially, I thought he would make my husband a perfect companion, but instead, he became my magical muse. Biscotti is an exuberant dog! Watching his wagging tail delights us. He has taught us to embrace joy and positivity no matter the day's circumstances. Spending time with him makes even the most challenging day seem manageable. Dogs are exacting equalizers in their ability to share their love. All of the love and attention he receives, he gives back tenfold. Biscotti is calming, charming, and oh-so handsome!



Susan and Isabelle & Frizzante

Adopter, Donor, and Volunteer

I've had shelter cats since childhood. Far from being aloof, each became treasured family members. They calm us when we worry, amuse us when we need it the most, and remind us that we are never alone. The only thing cuter, sweeter, or funnier than a cat is TWO (a bonded pair) or one who is friends with the family dog. Nothing beats watching our beloved pets play, explore, cuddle, and even play-fight together. This strengthens family bonds. Most of us have a cat-shaped hole in our hearts, whether we know it or not. My husband, a lifelong dog person, was instantly smitten by our first cat. He's been playmate, protector, mattress, and student of every cat since.

Don and Stanford, Penelope & London

Adopter and Community-Ambassador Client

Animals teach us patience and how to live in the now. Whenever I feel down, I just look at my dogs and feel better. I got my dog Stanford on a farm. He was in a chicken coop and really smelled! I also have a cat, Penelope, from the SF SPCA, and another dog, London, from a roommate. My dog Stanford helps me when I'm feeling anxious, just by being himself. Dogs are so sweet and supportive; they're always by your side. The effort you put into loving and caring for an animal will always come back to you.





201 Alabama Street
San Francisco, CA 94103
Change service requested.



California Adopt-a-Pet Day

Saturday, June 7, 2025

**Help us find homes for
more than 5,000 animals
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Find out more at caadoptapetday.org.