

# PROFILE

## Caring for Animals Means Caring for Their People: Legacy Gifts can do Both for Marginalized Communities

For already marginalized communities, the cost of caring for a companion animal, including veterinary care, can be prohibitive. Indeed, a recent study published in the journal *Frontiers in Veterinary Science* found that, among adults in British Columbia, those facing low income, unemployment, housing insecurity, and other factors covered by the Canadian Index of Multiple Deprivation (CIMD) were more likely to surrender their companion animals to shelters. The CIMD uses four factors of social vulnerability: Ethnocultural Composition, Economic Dependency, Residential Instability and Situational Vulnerability. Residential Instability in particular was shown to be a factor that predicted increased risk of surrender of an animal.

This is where the Regional Animal Protection Society (RAPS) shines brightest. The RAPS' bottom line is not profit. It is helping animals ... and their people. We understand that caring for animals demands that we recognize and ameliorate the challenges facing their guardians. RAPS has been saving and improving the lives of animals in Metro Vancouver for 25 years. We are a no-kill animal-serving organization that operates Canada's largest cat sanctuary, an adoption centre, a fostering network, a Pet Food Bank, three social enterprise thrift stores and, since 2018, the community-owned, not-for-profit RAPS Animal Hospital. We are also now in the process of fundraising to build B.C.'s largest no-kill dog sanctuary. For a quarter-century we have been assisting animals in households facing

economic challenges. Our Pet Food Bank ensures no one has to choose between feeding themselves or feeding their companion animal. Since opening the RAPS Animal Hospital, we have been able to expand our help exponentially because veterinary care is often the most daunting economic challenge pet owners face.

RAPS, through donor supported funds, provides interest-free payment plans for people who cannot afford upfront vet care and we provide the only gift cards for veterinarian services that offer 50 per cent additional benefits on each card.

We are proud to have developed community partnerships that encourage resilience among the most vulnerable Canadians. We work with agencies like the Salvation Army homeless shelter and emergency housing for those experiencing domestic violence to provide vet care to animals who are the companions of people who are homeless or in emergency or transitional housing. The relationships between these people and their animals are often the most significant connections in their lives. We recognize that helping people get their lives back on track means supporting the relationships that give them strength.

The impacts of veterinary care, such as examinations and vaccinations, can be astronomical. For example, the unfortunate truth is that a person who is experiencing domestic violence is 70% more likely to remain in the situation longer or return to it sooner if there is a pet in the house. This disturbing fact is one of many indications of the unintended con-



RAPS CEO Eyal Lichtmann and his dog Levi

sequences on humans of housing policies that discriminate against companion animals. A review done a couple of years ago indicated that, of Canada's 452 women's shelters, just eight accept pets. There is little reason to believe that much of significance has changed since then.

That is why RAPS provides compassionate boarding for people fleeing domestic violence, so that they can enter temporary housing while knowing that their animals are safe. Similarly, we provide free examinations and vaccinations through the RAPS Animal Hospital for those entering transitional or social housing where pets are allowed. This provides the pet guardians with the documentation required to be able to bring those animals with them into the safe environment. We hope to convince more homeless and transitional shelters to accept pets with RAPS Animal Hospital's help.

Our hope is to open our veterinary hospital 24 hours per day and 7 days per week which would save pet owners over \$10 million in veterinary charges each year. And our other goal is to provide the first real Animal Ambulance in the region. We believe this model of animal health care will revolutionize the veterinarian industry with a focus on animals and their people.

Many consider legacy gifts to animal-assisting charities or human-assisting ones but, in reality, helping animals also has an enormous impact on the wellbeing of their guardians.

Animals make our lives, families, neigh-

bourhoods and communities safer, healthier and happier. You can help people and animals – doubling the impact of your legacy.

In making decisions about how to ensure that the values that are important to us in life continue to thrive after we are gone, many people struggle between support-

ing causes that help animals and those that help people. We believe that is a false dichotomy. By supporting the Regional Animal Protection Society, your legacy gift helps animals ... and their people. There is hardly a more generous choice you could make.

*Eyal Lichtmann*  
*CEO of RAPS*

*Sources:*

*<https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fvets.2021.656597/full?fbclid=IwAR2RoAn3sH8HEQp7Gsx-7j2wlq7XT-PkAvPwBSKzb-gH22aU-qWmLVnw3k7ks>*