**Accessible and Crisis Veterinary and Petcare for Vulnerable Communities: A Community Conversation**

**Monday 19 September 2022**

**Michelle Robertson, CEO, RSPCA ACT**

**Meet the animals we care for**

* We cared for dogs Bonnie, Chevy and Bubbles as their owner was affected by the floods in QLD and they could not access local support.
* Dog Gus has been with us 5 times as his owner is having ongoing mental health issues
* Loki and Cora are two cats whose owner was a survivor of domestic violence.
* Mojo is a cat whose owner's house burned down.
* Princess, a 21-year-old cat whose owner was hospitalised stayed with us for over 4 months.  She was well loved and also received grooming as she was very matted, in fact the matting was so severe it restricted her movement and affected her quality of life.

**Socio-environmental context**

* 30.4 million Pets in Australia, 69% of households in 2021 own pets. Increase from 61% in 2019
* As at June 2020, 1 in 6 people were aged 65 (and over) with an expected increase in the size of the older population forecast until 2050
* 2.2 million Australians have experienced physical and or sexual violence and is also one of the main drivers of homelessness.  One in 4 Australian women has experienced sexual or physical violence by a current or former intimate partner since the age of 15.
* 116,000 people experience homelessness on any given night in Australia.
* One in five people or 4.2 million Australians had a 12-month mental disorder

**Core reasons for Emergency Boarding (crisis care) at ACT**

With these statistics drawing the harsh reality it is not surprising that the four key reasons Canberrans come to RSPCA ACT asking for emergency boarding help via our project safe are:

* Hospitalisation
* Homelessness
* Mental Health
* Domestic Violence

**Cumulative support RSPCA ACT has provided in emergency or crisis care**

* Over the past two financial years alone, RSPCA ACT has assisted **223** animals whose owners were in crisis.
* Thanks to a generous donation, we were also able to offer free desexing services to Emergency Boarding animals.  During the 2022 FY we provided 15 surgeries, 1 dental and 67 non-surgical procedures to EB animals.

* In addition, over the past two years we performed **965** surgeries and provided **233 c**onsultations and primary vet care to low income and in crisis Canberrans.

* We have steadily, again thanks to generous support from our donors and the community, been able to add and build additional capacity for Emergency Boarding, but still this is not enough.  Together, there is still much work that needs to be done.

* In theory we have space set aside for **7** emergency boarding animals, but the reality is that we create as much space as we are safely able to do... as of today we have 9 EB animals in care.

* Another worrying emerging issue is affordability - with affordability now being one of the top four reasons for surrendering animals.

*"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world: indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."*

*―Margaret Mead*