

Project Hope offers free veterinary care for homeless, domestic violence victims' pets

Rough sleepers and domestic violence victims' pets are being offered free veterinary care in an effort to keep 'man and man's best friend' together.

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The Southern Cross Compassionate Fund is also known as Project HoPe (short for homeless pets). Picture: Supplied

Rough sleepers and domestic violence victims' pets are being offered free veterinary care in an effort to keep man and man's best friend together.

The Southern Cross Compassionate Fund, also known as Project HoPe (short for homeless pets), aims to ease the financial burden of veterinary care to support Sydney's homeless community and the special bond they share with their companion animals.

Since it was founded in 2014 by Doctor Sam Kovac, the initiative has expanded into clinics at St Peters, Surry Hills and Bellevue Hill, crisis accommodation, and pop-up stalls across the city.

Practice manager Clare Keating said pets were often the only emotional support their clients had while experiencing homelessness or domestic violence.

"I think everybody has a bond with their pet, but when you see somebody that's living on the street, the bond they have with their pet is something completely different," she said.



The initiative aims to ease the financial burden of veterinary care. Picture: Supplied

"In domestic violence cases you can't even imagine what they're going through at home. "But people rely on these animals and if they've got small children, the kids tend to look towards their pets as the only kind of happiness at home as well.

"So doing what we can for these kind of clients is so important."

Ms Keating said this was important in cases where lifesaving care was at stake.

Only weeks ago, pet-owner Rodney, who had been homeless for seven months, brought his dog Miromaa into the Surry Hills clinic after he noticed she wasn't eating and had lost weight.

After Miromaa was diagnosed with cancer, Project HoPe covered \$15,000 worth of treatments including surgery and blood transfusions in an effort to save her.

"When they did the operation, the vets realised it was a really aggressive type of lymphoma which is not responsive to chemotherapy," Ms Keating said.



Miromaa received surgery and blood transfusions through Project HoPe. Picture: Supplied



Project Hope runs pop-up vet clinics in disadvantaged areas across Sydney. Picture: Supplied

"We had Miromaa in with us for about 10 days of monitoring and then, sadly, last Wednesday, we had to make the call.

"Instead of keeping her in the hospital, Rodney got to take her home ... so he could spend as much time with her as possible."

Ms Keating said being able to give pet-owners and pets like Rodney and Miromaa a few more months together was possible thanks to the generosity of other clients.

Project HoPe is run on charitable donations and matches every dollar it receives as the charitable arm of the Southern Cross Veterinary Clinic.

This has made initiatives including vaccination drives possible, with staff driving through areas of Sydney to have every pet of the homeless and underprivileged immunised against preventable diseases.

Project HoPe also helped convert the Jewish House in Bondi Junction into a pet-friendly shelter for people trying to escape domestic violence, as well as hosting pop-up clinics for low income households to get their pets consulted for free.

Ms Keating said each pet-owner and their four-legged friend deserves a happy ending regardless of the price.

"Seeing that you're able to make a small kind of positive difference to their lives ... is definitely special," she said.