



FOOD *for* THOUGHT

Summer 2024

Pet support funding is falling short Help is needed to care for senior clients' furry friends

Ed lives alone, but he's rarely by himself. If he's sitting down, chances are Ed has a cat on his lap.

"They're very affectionate," Ed said of Atticus and Boo, a pair of cats with whom he shares his home. Atticus and Boo rely on Ed for food, shelter and affection. He relies on them for companionship and a distraction from his worries.

Confined to his home due to multiple health conditions, Ed said it would be easy to spend his days dwelling on his problems and thinking about the things he can no longer do. Instead, he spends his time caring for and loving on his two furry companions.

"I was giving them my food. Now, I eat my whole lunch myself."
— Ed, YMOW client and pet owner

But it wasn't always so easy. Like so many senior pet owners, Ed once struggled to afford food and care for his cats, often foregoing meals himself in order to provide for Atticus and Boo.

"I was giving them my food," said Ed. He was relieved to learn that YMOW's Pets Assisting the Lives of Seniors (PALS) program could help.

"Now, I eat my whole lunch myself," said Ed, who receives cat food and litter through YMOW.

Launched in 2009, YMOW's pet support program delivers food, cat litter and treats to clients who struggle to afford such essentials. Products are delivered in lightweight, manageable quantities that seniors can easily lift without risk of injury. Since its launch, PALS has expanded to also provide vaccinations, preventatives, medications, vet visits and grooming. But without additional funding, the future of the program is at risk, said Kelly Schwartz, YMOW Operations Director and director of the PALS program.

"Our biggest need right now is funding to continue to provide basic veterinary care and grooming for our clients' aging pets," Kelly said.

The average cost of an annual vet visit, including wellness check, vaccines and six months of preventative is \$500-\$550 per pet. Annual dog visits alone exceed \$22,000. This does not include other vet

visits for cats, dental, complex care or urgent care services

These costs also don't account for the increasing demand for PALS services. 2023 saw a 35% growth in the number of animals served by PALS, bringing the yearlong total to 80 cats and dogs.

Kelly said that for dogs and cats of seniors, grooming isn't just about making a pet look good. It's a matter of health for pets and their owners. Since our clients are unable to walk their dogs outside, they typically are in need of frequent nail trims. **(continued on page 3)**



Ed and Atticus

Volunteers are a vital part of the YMOW team

Quarter 1 honoree Rick Humesky

Knowledge of a foreign language certainly isn't required of YMOW volunteers. But that hasn't stopped Rick Humesky from learning phrases in Spanish and Romanian as part of his role at YMOW.



Rick Humesky

When Rick learned that a client on his Monday route spoke Romanian, he took it upon himself to learn a few simple phrases with which to greet her.

"She lit up," he said, before she quickly corrected his pronunciation.

Going the extra step is typical for Rick, a YMOW volunteer for the past three years and YMOW's Volunteer of the Quarter.

"Rick comes in every Monday to ride along with one of our CCAs," said Chris Brown, supportive services manager at YMOW. Mondays are particularly busy at YMOW. More than any other day of the week, staff relies on volunteers to help deliver meals, cat litter, and donations from Food Gatherers.

When an emergency left a volunteer unable to do their route on a recent Monday, it could have been a big deal, Chris said. But Rick quickly stepped in to take the route, even though he had never delivered meals alone.

Living just a block from YMOW and learning from his wife M.J. Dennison's longtime involvement as a YMOW volunteer, Rick knew the needs of his community and wanted to do his part. He now looks forward to his shift every week.

"I get to interact with each client. That's the best part," said Rick, who takes time to speak to every person on his route, in whatever language they prefer. He sometimes helps with simple chores, such as taking out the trash or grabbing the day's mail.

Whether it's carrying cat litter or learning to greet someone in a new language, Rick said he knows every little thing he does as a YMOW volunteer makes a difference.

"It's very gratifying," he said.

Quarter 2 honorees Carola and Tim Baker

Every once in a while, we're reminded of little bits of good that resulted from the largely negative event that was the pandemic of 2020. One of those bits comes from Carola Baker, half of the volunteer team that's recognized as YMOW's volunteer of the second quarter, 2024.

"We couldn't do ride-alongs during COVID," said Carola, who had been assisting client care associates during deliveries since 2019. To continue volunteering, Carola had to go out on her own. Once she did, she never looked back.

"I feel like I'm more of a part of it," Carola said. "You learn who these people are."

Husband Tim joined her upon his retirement and now accompanies Carola every Friday.

YMOW Supportive Services Manager Chris Brown said he relies on the Bakers to bring each client on their route exactly what they need.

"I really appreciate their attention to detail, counting through all their materials before heading out, and knowing which clients like to receive extra items on their route," Chris said.

Whether it's some extra produce or a few minutes of friendly conversation, Carola said she and Tim are happy to do what they can to make someone's day a little better.

"It's a big deal," Carola said, because their Friday visit is the last that most clients will have until Monday. "That's a long time."

Tim said his work with YMOW has made him more aware of the needs of his neighbors and of a population that often goes unseen.

He's also reminded of the importance that a simple gesture can have on someone's life.

"It's a small thing," Tim said, unless you're the one in need of a meal.



Carola and Tim Baker

Pet support funding

(continued from page 1)

Cats' nails can cause scratches that can easily become infected. And because many seniors don't have the strength or stamina to bathe or brush their pets, matting can be a problem.

"We are so lucky to have a wonderful mobile groomer that gives us a generous discount on services," Kelly said of Ruff Revolution.

Immediate funding is needed to continue providing veterinary and grooming services. Without funding, we will need to focus our efforts on providing monthly cat litter and pet food, leaving our homebound seniors to provide vet care for their pet. Because most clients have incomes of less than \$1,000 a month, many pets will surely go without proper care without YMOW's help.

"Since the PALS program began, we have fed and cared for hundreds of pets who enhance the lives of their caregivers. Keeping the pets healthy and happy makes a big difference in the lives of the homebound seniors we serve. Without this program, both pets and seniors would be less happy and less healthy," Kelly said.

Ed, Atticus and Boo agree.

"They absolutely make me happier," Ed said.



Donate by texting YMOWRefresh to 71777

YMOW Leadership

Barbara Niess-May

President/CEO

Kelly Schwartz

Director of Operations

Dieter Otto

Board Chair - President

Tara Truax

Vice President

Steve Smith

Treasurer

Scott Godbold

Secretary

YMOW Board of Directors

Dan Carleton

Anna Jackson

Brent Kolb, DDS

Francisca Tehoda

Food for Thought is published by Ypsilanti Meals on Wheels. For comments or questions, or if you prefer to receive *Food for Thought* via email, contact Sandy Bosch at sandy@ymow.org, or 734-217-4578.

Help deliver meals and smiles

All it takes is an hour or two to provide meals and a friendly visit to your homebound neighbors. Visit ymow.org/volunteer to learn more, or send an email to Supportive Services Manager Chris Brown at chris@ymow.org.

Welcome Kevin Craven

YMOW's new case manager, Kevin Craven, is here to help clients connect with the local services they need.

"Aging can be lonely," he said. By connecting seniors with local resources, both within YMOW and beyond, Kevin hopes to build connections that broaden the scope of a homebound senior's world.

Before coming to YMOW, Kevin fulfilled a similar role in Ann Arbor, where he worked with people experiencing homelessness. He said YMOW's focus on seniors and its location near his new home in Ypsilanti make his new role a perfect fit.

Kevin holds a PhD in philosophy from the University of Michigan. He and wife Aesha share their home with their dog, Bailey, and recently welcomed their first child, Audre.

Kevin is a self-described film buff who enjoys cooking, bicycling and spending time with family.



YMOW Board Chair Dieter Otto, a longtime employee of Eastern Michigan University, accepted the 2024 Cathy Day Step-Up-To-the-Plate award on behalf of EMU at YMOW's annual Meals on Heels/50th Anniversary event in April.

The award recognizes a person or organization that exemplifies the generous "can do, will do" spirit of YMOW's late friend and board chair, Cathy Day. Like Cathy, EMU is always there when we need them.