

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Humane Society of Berks County Expands Pet Loss and Bereavement Program for Grieving Pet Owners

The Humane Society of Berks County, Berks County's leader in animal welfare, announced an expansion of its groundbreaking Pet Loss and Bereavement program designed to help pet owners struggling to cope with the death of a companion animal. Introduced in June, 2007, the Pet Loss and Bereavement program provides counseling and support for those who have lost an animal member of their family and are finding it hard to grapple with the loss. "We knew there was a need for this program," said Karel Minor, HSBC executive director. "However, we underestimated the overwhelming response and the scope of the counseling that might be required for some participants. The expansion we are announcing will help to ensure that every person can get the assistance he or she needs in the best possible setting"

The expanded program is being undertaken in partnership with FairView Counseling, a non-profit organization located at 1255 Perkiomen Avenue, Reading. The regular group sessions will continue on a monthly basis and will continue to be provided free of charge. The off-site location will permit larger groups, as well as daytime and weekend sessions, which are more convenient for the public and permit seniors who may have nighttime driving concerns to attend. Because FairView offers complete, comprehensive counseling services, participants that require additional one-on-one counseling can have that need accommodated.

Pet Loss and Bereavement counseling seminars have been offered on a monthly basis at the HSBC's Reading shelter. They are free and open to anyone who needs support and advice for managing the grief associated with the loss of an important family pet. The sessions were conducted by volunteer counselors who worked with attendees to provide tools and techniques for handling loss. As the program progressed, the groups grew larger than the 11th Street facility could accommodate. It also became apparent that some participants desired services beyond what the HSBC was able to provide. "We also had some concerns about holding the sessions at

a facility housing animals,” said Minor. “Asking a person who is grieving over a lost pet to get counseling surrounded by pets was not the most desirable counseling circumstance.”

The Humane Society had particular praise and thanks for the volunteers who helped begin the program and assisted in ensuring its successful growth. Robin Lucas and Elizabeth “E.J.” Jackson, two area counselors, worked with Humane Society Board President, Lee Pickett, VMD, to develop the counseling program. “Although the staff knew there was a need for this program, it was these caring and dedicated volunteers who gave of their time and helped the Humane Society to create this program,” said Minor. “Robin and E.J. have the thanks and appreciation of the staff and board of the Humane Society, as well as all those who have been helped through this counseling, for their partnership with our organization.”

In addition to the general public, the HSBC is continuing to extend the invitation to the hundreds of pet owners utilizing the Humane Society’s End of Life services each year for sick pets. Program brochures are also being distributed to area veterinarians. According to Minor, veterinarians and animal shelters are trained to handle the technical aspects of euthanizing pets and can offer support during the procedure. However, longer-term emotional support tends to fall outside the training or practical ability of animal care professionals to provide.

“We hope that this program and our partnership with counselors and psychologists will bring the needed expertise to those who need it most,” said Minor. The next session will be held Saturday, March 29, from 10 AM to Noon at FairView Counseling. More information about the sessions, including upcoming dates, is available at www.berkshumane.org under “Services”.

The Humane Society of Berks County serves all of Berks County and surrounding communities. It is a private, non-profit organization funded through donations and service fees. In addition to enforcing Pennsylvania’s animal cruelty laws, the Humane Society provides adoption services, spay and neuter services, humane education, pet behavioral counseling, veterinary services to the general public, and helps stray, injured and mistreated animals. The Humane Society is located at 1801 N. 11th Street, Reading.

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