PET PROGRAM SERVICE MODEL

Socialization: Pet Programming
Pet Program Service Model

Member Program: Senior Resources
Pet Program Name: Pet Pals
Location: Columbia, SC

PET PROGRAM SERVICE MODEL INTRODUCTION

Members have fine-tuned their pet program service and delivery models over the years to ensure clients receive the support they need. While pet programs across the Meals on Wheels network operate differently, one thing is always the same: each successful service model works well for the organization and ensures consistent and reliable services for clients. As part of this case study series, we have documented several models that Members have found to be effective, which are intended to spark new ideas, insights and learnings. In this case study, we will learn about Senior Resources’ program model for pet food deliveries in Columbia, SC.

CASE STUDY OVERVIEW

Senior Resources has over 15 years of experience serving clients and their pets through their pet program, Pet Pals. During this time, they have found that dedicated volunteers and coordinated pet food management are two of their most successful strategies. Their program currently serves 46 clients and 98 pets, which includes 44 dogs and 54 cats. The program provides pet food deliveries once a month and deliveries include enough pet food to last each client for a full month.

MANAGEMENT & STORAGE

Pet Pals’ delivery model relies on strong processes for managing and organizing storage for all incoming and outgoing pet food. Senior Resources has been in the same building since 1999 and during a renovation in 2016, Pet Pals was able to convert an extra conference room into their pet food storage room. This room includes several racks of shelving, which can hold up to three months of pet food (or nearly 150 bags!), and tables for volunteers to use for packaging. There are also separate areas for cat food, dog food, toys and cat litter.
The program dates and organizes all pet food when it arrives, which helps them manage expiration dates. In fact, before Pet Pals moved into their new storage room, they had to throw away pet food that was not tracked and had expired. The team shared that their space allows for an organized setup, which ensures efficiency and makes it easy to get pet food in and out for deliveries. “Storing or arranging your inventory in a way that works well for your team is very important. It allows you to see and know what you’ve got,” said Anne Shissias, Director of In-Home Services at Senior Resources.

PET PALS’ LEAD VOLUNTEER

Pet Pals’ lead volunteer manages the storage room, as well as delivery preparation and program operations. This volunteer has been with Pet Pals for over eight years and their unique role has been critical to Pet Pals programming over the years. During their monthly shift (which falls on the second Friday of each month), they complete several key tasks:

• MANAGING INCOMING PET FOOD: First, the volunteer organizes the food that has been delivered during the previous month. They label each item and arrange all new food on the shelves according to date. In between the volunteer’s monthly shifts, Senior Resources staff leave any pet food that has been ordered or donated in the Pet Pals room in its original packaging. This helps ensure the lead volunteer has oversight over all incoming food.

• PREP FOR VOLUNTEER PICK UP: Next, the volunteer groups the current month’s pet food by route and packages it for delivery volunteers to pick up.

• INVENTORY MANAGEMENT: Once the lead volunteer finishes labeling and preparing the deliveries for the current month, they determine the different types of pet food and quantities that they will need for the following month. Next, the volunteer sends a list of needs to Anne. She places an order for these supplies so that the items are ready for the lead volunteer to unpack and arrange when they come in the following month. This process guarantees that the program is only ordering food and supplies that are needed at that time.

THE PROCESS

After the lead volunteer prepares the deliveries, several other volunteers step in to support pet food deliveries. In total, Pet Pals has nine pet routes and nine volunteers. Each volunteer is assigned to a route, which typically includes about five clients per route.
With this model, they are able to engage members in their community, successfully manage their inventory, and continuously serve each and every client who is interested in this service.

Volunteers must complete all deliveries on or before the third Saturday of the month. To prepare for their deliveries, volunteers will pick up the pet food for their route from Senior Resources any time after the second Friday of each month (when the pet food is packaged) but before the delivery date. This schedule provides volunteers with a window of four to five business days to complete their pickup. Volunteers pick up their deliveries in the Pet Pals room and sign in to confirm that they retrieved the food. If there are routes that aren’t picked up during this time, Senior Resources’ staff take over the route for the month.

**SOURCING PET FOOD**

Pet Pals receives roughly half of their pet food from donors and purchases the remainder through online vendors. Pet Pals only has one restriction when it comes to donations: they will not take any open bags of food.

Much of their donated food comes from food drives that community groups organize, such as veterinary offices and other local businesses. Blue Cross Blue Shield, which has a large office in the area, supports Pet Pals as part of their wellness program. The company often holds competitive pet food drives for employees and winners receive fun prizes for providing donations, such as coupons to wear jeans on Fridays.

**LESSONS LEARNED**

Over the last 15 years, Pet Pals has learned several important lessons. First, it’s important to have volunteers who are invested and passionate about clients and pets. As Anne said, “Get a good volunteer – you can't do it yourself!” Pet Pals’ lead volunteer also works closely with other animal welfare organizations in the community. This has not only helped to recruit new volunteers from these organizations, but it has also created connections so that they can share any unused pet food with other local organizations.

It’s also important to understand exactly what clients need and communicate expectations clearly with volunteers. “Volunteers can’t get to work if they don’t have what they need and know what to do,” said Anne.

**CONCLUSION**

Together, these strategies have helped the Pet Pals team expand the number of clients and pets receiving these important services. The implementation of these new strategies has allowed the team to expand from 24 clients in 2017 to 46 clients currently. With this model, they are able to engage members in their community, successfully manage their inventory, and continuously serve each and every client who is interested in this service.