

Saving Ontario's Northern dogs

When asked her opinion on the matter, famous poet Emily Dickinson once said, "Dogs are better than human beings because they know, but do not tell". This could not be any truer when referring to the struggle of survival that hundreds of stray dogs living in remote Northern Ontario communities face, year after year. That's where the Cat Lake Friends of Animush (Ojicree for dog) Rescue steps up to offer their assistance to dogs in need.

The Friends of Animush Rescue is a non-profit organization made up of a dedicated team of volunteer veterinarians and veterinary technicians from Hanover Veterinary Hospital, Heartland Veterinary Services of Listowel, New Hamburg Veterinary Clinic, and Queensway Animal Clinic in Simcoe, while the Rescue's educators and valued support staff are from Brantford, Kitchener, Fergus and Mount Forest.

Since 2004, the Rescue has held an annual veterinary clinic in its namesake community of Cat Lake to provide neuters/spays, immunization, parasite control and animal welfare education. What once began as a communal project to help members with the emotional after-effects caused by necessary dog culling (to prevent dangerous numbers of dogs), animal injuries and cases of neglect or death by vehicular accidents in an environment overwrought with depression, has evolved into positive changes regarding the treatment of these dogs. The dogs are becoming loved and respected, are able to form a bond with their owners and have the comforts of human companionship which leads to longer and healthier lives for all involved. Just this summer alone, the Friends of Animush held three successful humane animal welfare clinics in Eabametoong First Nation, North Caribou Lake First Nation and again in Cat Lake First Nation, where 162 neuter/spay surgeries were completed to help these communities with their companion animal overpopulation problems.

The people of Eabametoong First Nation in Fort Hope and in North Caribou First Nation in Weagamow Lake were welcoming and helpful to the team during this first clinic in their respective communities, which took place this past July. Cat Lake plans to move forward with their humane animal treatment plan of determining how they, as a community, can make changes to help maintain better control of their companion animal population. The Chief and Council members will be looking at setting parameters for the number of pets allowed per household, disallowing unaltered animals to be brought into the community and will continue in discussions concerning the mandatory neuter/spay of animals in order to control the companion animal population in a community that has little or no animal services.

Cat Lake's Council members have also asked for the Friends of Animush assistance later this summer in removing and re-homing any dogs determined to be abandoned. This is a reasonable request, along with continuation of the neuter/spay program. However, to successfully aid the people of Cat Lake and other First Nations, the Rescue team recognizes that this is a very expensive endeavor in while each of the communities involved are responsible to provide some funding as well as accommodations, local transportation, and a community-based assistant and translator, that leaves much more fundraising to be done by Rescue team members to cover the high costs involved in such a project. In addition to the monies contributed by the Rescue's fundraising money earned through calendar sales sponsored by local businesses, note cards, and barbeques, long hours all spent to help save and rehome these absolutely wonderful Northern dogs, the Rescue team kindly asks for any assistance that can be provided, whether it be financial, equipment or supplies, or even the ability to foster or adopt one of these loyal and in-need animals.

The Friends of Animush are thankful for continued support from veterinary clinics, veterinary pharmaceutical companies, pet-food companies, private monetary donations and to the International Fund for Animal Welfare for the use of their equipment.

You can be a part of the assistance by donation, fostering, adoption or joining the team by visiting them at www.catlakedogrescue.ca