

# Michigan First to Certify Animal Rescues to Save More Lives

**Foster-based animal rescue groups are implementing best practices and abiding by a code of ethics**

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Detroit – The Michigan Pet Fund Alliance opened enrollment for the Michigan Rescue Certification Program (MRCP) on Monday, March 1, 2013. Foster-based animal rescue groups that are not yet certified for 2013 are asked to submit an online application between March 1 and April 30. The application link, program description and documents are available online at <http://www.michiganpetfund.org/rescue-certification>.

MRCP is the state's first voluntary certification program for rescues and is open to all companion-animal rescue groups, including dogs, cats and small companion mammals. The program was developed by a task force of representatives from local rescue groups, animal shelter and adoption centers and animal advocacy organizations, including Paws for Life Rescue, N.B.S. Animal Rescue, PapAdopters & Placement Service, Humane Society of Huron Valley and Puppy Mill Awareness of SE Michigan. Input and feedback was gathered from a large number of rescue organizations, shelters and advocates across Michigan.

"Each year, more than 100,000 homeless cats and dogs in Michigan are killed in shelters. The majority of these companion animals are healthy or treatable and could be rehomed if organizations worked together," said Deborah Schutt, chairperson of Michigan Pet Fund Alliance.

The initial program launch was held at the 2012 Michigan No-Kill Conference in Lansing, where Michigan rescue groups and shelters learned and shared animal care standards related to healthy environments, nutrition, exercise, socialization, daily health checks, transport, behavioral rehabilitation and medical protocols.

Eleven rescue organizations have been certified so far.

"The intent of the program is to share best practices, improve shelter capacity and ensure that the rescue organization is reputable," said Courtney Protz-Sanders, executive director and founder of Paws for Life Rescue.

The Michigan Department of Agriculture & Rural Development is responsible for the oversight of 188 licensed animal shelters, which does not include the 200+ animal rescue organizations currently operating in the state.

"New rescue organizations like mine, with a passion for finding caring homes for the animals in our foster homes, are often left to recreate the wheel or learn the ropes through trial-and-error experience," said Jaime Wolfe, co-founder of N.B.S. Animal Rescue, which through this program is now a 5-star certified rescue.

"This program helps implement safe and proven medical protocols that rescues may not be familiar with, such as pediatric spay/neuter. If we don't want to be a part of the problem, we must be vigilant in guaranteeing that all pets are sterilized," said Mary C. Rupley, DVM, senior consultant.

Certified rescues are asked to operate according to a code of ethics. These ethics dictate transparency, honesty, respect and operations that further the goal of highlighting reputable rescue groups.

“We are striving to develop more relationships between the rescue community and the shelter community, so that all healthy and treatable animals can be saved,” said Ellen Stuban, co-founder of PapAdopters & Placement Service.

“Some rescues groups have signed waivers stating they will migrate away from relationships with breeders, stop attending auctions and no longer transport animals into Michigan, and instead will focus on pulling animals from local shelters in our state,” said Pam Sordyl, founder of Puppy Mill Awareness of Southeast Michigan.

Rescue organizations apply for certification annually and when it is granted, they are provided documentation that can be displayed on websites, in printed materials and at adoption events.

“The simple task of promptly returning phone calls and answering e-mails are all components of a well-run organization,” said Kelly Schwartz, director of facilities and volunteer programs at Humane Society of Huron Valley.

As the program becomes more established, it will provide added benefits to certified rescue organizations, such as grants, educational opportunities, specialized behavior training for volunteers, fundraising opportunities and cost reductions through joint purchases and ventures.

It is the intent of the Michigan Rescue Certification Program to:

- Leverage best practices and collaborations to eliminate the 90,000+ deaths of homeless healthy and treatable cats and dogs in Michigan
- Provide a code of ethics and best practices for rescue organizations
- Assure the public, including adoption event hosts, businesses, donors, adopters and potential volunteers, that certified rescue organizations operate according to the standards set by the Best Practices Handbook and the Michigan Certified Rescue Organization Code of Ethics
- Assure donors and animal welfare funders of professional capacity
- Improve collaborations and partnerships by assuring shelters and other rescues that certified rescue organizations operate to standards that are reputable and have been vetted for partnerships

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The Michigan Pet Fund Alliance a 501 (c)3 charitable organization, works to end the killing of healthy and treatable homeless cats and dogs in Michigan by collaborating with animal shelters and rescue organizations to achieve No Kill through training, technical assistance, education and advocacy.