



Stories from the Heart



Because Someone Cares

By Linda Tynan

One person **CAN** make a difference

In today's world, we often see things that bother us in the news, on the streets and in rural areas; conditions that make us feel sad and distraught. We wonder how we can make it better; it often seems the problem before us is

**“Never believe
that a few caring
people can't change
the world. For,
indeed, that's all who
ever have.”**

-- Margaret Mead (1902-1978)

so overwhelming it is out of control; we feel we cannot make a difference in the outcome. One woman, Kim Swaim, begs to differ, and her passion is contagious. Dr. Will Snow caught the spirit to change the desperate situation of the animals in Jamaica from Swaim, a respiratory therapist from Florida.

Swaim visited the island of Jamaica on vacation in 2001 and was bothered by the poor conditions of the numerous dogs wandering the streets. There is a great deal of poverty in this small country, and the animals are affected by this environment combined with the lack of animal welfare education. Starving animals have litters of offspring that cannot be fed, and illness and injuries go untreated. Swaim saw a need for an organization to help these animals and went to work raising funds and recruiting volunteers. She believes that by improving the conditions for the animals, it will, in turn, improve the lives of the people. In 2002, Swaim formed the International Spay/Neuter Network which works with the Ministry of Agriculture & Fisheries — Veterinary Services Division and

the Jamaica Veterinary Medical Association, along with numerous volunteers, to host community spay/neuter clinics throughout the year in Jamaica.

Dr. Snow had visited the Bahamas and fell in love with the climate, cultures, people and environment of the area. He was researching the availability of work opportunities in the Caribbean and contacted the secretary of the Jamaican VMA, Dr. Paul Cadogan. Dr. Cadogan did not know of any job openings, but he recommended Snow get involved with ISNN because it might be a way to network with people in the islands. Once Snow got involved, he caught the passion for the work the organization is doing. Snow has now been involved with the group for almost two years; he has participated in six clinics and now serves on their board of directors. “When I am working in the free clinics we hold in Jamaica, I am overwhelmed with a sense of gratitude. The feelings I get from being blessed with the opportunity to be of service are absolutely wonderful,” says Snow.



No one involved in the program gets paid for any of the work. In fact, all the volunteers actually pay a fee to participate and they pay their own airfare. The fee helps to cover some of the travel and food costs. Volunteers send out requests for supplies, which they bring with them. This provides many of the necessary supplies such as sutures, drapes, medications, etc. The ISNN purchases additional supplies with grant money from organizations such as the Pegasus Foundation. The program is heavily dependent upon the fees volunteers pay for the opportunity to participate. No one in the ISNN organization draws a salary, so all donations go towards paying for the materials needed to run the clinics. For most of the clinics, Couples Resorts and Sandals Resorts donate free room and board for all the volunteers. These clinics would not be possible without their generous support.

The clinics last three days and are performed in concrete block buildings or tents with no air-conditioning - only windows. Volunteers

provide very high-quality surgeries and help to train the local veterinary community. There is absolutely no cost for the surgeries, and they are meant to serve only the very poor and needy population of Jamaica as well as any unowned street animals that can be rounded up. Volunteers also perform trap-neuter-return operations to help control feral cat colonies. The Jamaican Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals is involved in most of these clinics by providing volunteers and animal transport which is very helpful when most low income pet owners do not own cars and cannot get their pets to the clinic. Clinics provide hands-on training for local veterinarians in high volume spay/neuter surgical techniques and vet technician training in all areas. Packets containing instructional DVD's, articles of interest as well as emergency response and anesthetic drug charts are distributed. Veterinarians discuss and problem solve concerns such as the anesthesia and analgesic drug shortages, efficiency, utilizing their technicians and drug protocols (safety, cost, availability etc).



Jamaican dogs waiting in the kennel for their spay/neuter surgeries.

“I am truly blessed that God has gifted me with special talents and then shown me a way to give back to the world.”

-Dr. Will Snow



Dr. Snow (right) works with another volunteer from Miami at one of the makeshift clinics.

Humane Education is a large part of the work the ISNN is doing. The ISNN works to educate children and pet owners during the clinic while their pets are being treated. The older children have the opportunity to learn more about pet overpopulation and the physical needs of animals, while younger children participate in games, arts and crafts, all with the aim of inspiring compassion for all animals. Many children are given a tour of the clinic. In 2010, with a grant from the Park Foundation, 1000 “Caring For” books were purchased to provide information on the proper care of dogs, cats, and horses. These books are distributed by ISNN at the clinics, through local veterinarians, to libraries and to children at summer camp.

“The work is very hard and the conditions are often very difficult, but the opportunity to work with and for some great people is something I will always treasure,” says Snow.

In addition to the work Snow does in Jamaica, he is a sole practitioner in the Mobile area where he offers 50 percent off for sterilization surgeries for any pet adopted from or currently staying in a local rescue shelter. He also provides 50 percent off spays and neuters for feral cats by working with Azalea City Cat Coalition trap-neuter-return program and participates in the ALVMF license plate discount spay/neuter program. Dr. Snow’s work is a wonderful example of how one caring person can make a difference. To learn more about the ISNN visit <http://www.spay-neuterjamaica.org/>