

## **THE HUMANE SOCIETY VETERINARY MEDICAL ASSOCIATION RURAL AREA VETERINARY SERVICES**

The Humane Society Veterinary Medical Association Rural Area Veterinary Services program (HSVMA-RAVS), established in 1995, is a non-profit veterinary service-learning program. Our programs combine high quality direct care veterinary field clinics with clinical training for current and future veterinary professionals to improve the health and welfare of animals in underserved rural communities where poverty and geographic isolation make regular veterinary care inaccessible.

Each year, RAVS brings high quality preventative health care to more than 7,000 animals in 40 communities where no other animal services exist, including communities on Native American reservations throughout the United States, remote villages in Latin America, and island nations in the Caribbean and Pacific. On each visit, we prevent unwanted litters, teach basic animal care and respect and ease animal suffering-treating everything from parasite infections in dogs to work-related horse injuries. In 2012, the program provided over 1.3 million dollars in veterinary services, all at no cost to the communities or families we serve.

As a professional teaching program, RAVS engages veterinary students from 30 different veterinary schools throughout North America and the UK. Each year, more than 250 veterinary students participate in RAVS field clinics. Under the guidance and supervision of highly skilled veterinary professionals, students have the opportunity to learn and practice a broad range of clinical skills, from client communication and education, assessment, prevention, and treatment of disease, to anesthesia and surgery.

RAVS field programs are volunteer-dependent. Clinics are operated by experienced veterinary field staff and a large corps of volunteer professionals. In 2012 more than 110 veterinarians and veterinary technicians donated their time in the field. These volunteers come from private and institutional practices all over the country and pay all of their own travel expenses to participate - often taking their limited vacation or holidays to donate their time and expertise. Volunteers work long hours in often less than ideal conditions. Lodging usually consists of a sleeping bag on a gym floor and luxuries like a hot shower are not always available. It is extremely challenging work, but the community connections and the rewards of helping so many animals and people in need are immeasurable and draw return volunteers year after year. Many volunteers return home inspired to bring the same quality service-minded care to the animals and people of their own communities.

### **CARING FOR ANIMALS IN NEED**

A typical RAVS field clinic will include 30 veterinary student volunteers and 15 veterinarians and technicians who will travel together for 1-2 weeks, often moving daily to a new community. Highly portable, everything the team needs to turn a local gymnasium or community center in to a fully functioning field hospital is carefully packed in a single converted horse trailer. While the primary focus of our clinic is spay/neuter and basic wellness care our teams are also called upon to treat a range of illnesses and other concerns, from traumatic injuries to infectious disease. In a two week tour the team may perform up to 300 surgeries and administer thousands of vaccinations and other treatments.

The impact of RAVS' services for families in communities hard hit by economic conditions and lack of access to care is clear. Our clinics have made the difference between quality veterinary care and no care at all. Often the difference is life and death. Clients line up for hours before our doors open each morning seeking care for their animals. In every community we serve, residents and community leaders express appreciation and immeasurable gratitude for the care their animals have received.

## **TRAINING AND ENGAGING VETERINARY PROFESSIONALS**

In addition to the direct impact of our programs on animals in the communities we serve, the RAVS program aims to address critical issues in animal health care and veterinary education by engaging veterinary students and dedicated professionals in a unique and potentially life-changing experience.

Many of our students will see more animals, handle a greater variety and volume of products, and see more surgery and anesthesia cases in their two weeks with RAVS than in 4 years of school. The intensity of a RAVS clinic creates memories that stay with our student volunteers long past graduation. Each aspect of our training program is designed to emphasize the best practice possible, demonstrating that even in less than ideal conditions; quality veterinary care can still be provided.

Not just a student training program, RAVS field clinics are also RACE approved continuing education opportunities for veterinarians and veterinary technicians. Through extensive online training, pre-clinic assessment and daily on-site didactic and practical training in anesthesia, surgery, field medicine and animal welfare, our professional team strives to expose veterinary professionals to high quality techniques and treatment protocols that can be utilized in a wide range of clinical settings. Our professional volunteers range from experienced practitioners, many veterans of several RAVS clinics, to recent graduates eager to broaden their horizons and improve their skills. Each volunteer works closely with our experienced staff to deliver on the RAVS promise of high quality care and high quality training.

## **MAKING A DIFFERENCE**

RAVS clinics make a dramatic, lasting impact on the lives of people and animals alike. RAVS programs are cooperative efforts between the communities we visit and HSVMA-RAVS. Community leaders and public health workers help plan and carry out clinics so the RAVS program truly has specific value to each community we serve.

After the clinic, the RAVS team must move on, and the key to making the future better for animals and people is to empower community members to continue practicing responsible, humane care for their animals. Everywhere we go we teach basic animal care and disease prevention and visit local schools with humane education programs, and we follow up with return visits-because lasting change can only come when community members are committed to providing better care for their animals themselves.

In addition to the direct impact of RAVS programs on animals in the communities we serve, our volunteer and veterinary student teaching programs serve as a bridge between the veterinary profession and animal protection efforts. Working with hundreds of volunteer veterinary professionals and veterinary students each year, we aspire to engage these compassionate individuals in meaningful community service. By demonstrating the tremendous need that exists and giving them the tools to use their expertise to create real improvements in animal care and welfare, RAVS inspires veterinary professionals and future veterinarians to carry this vision forward in their careers by taking this dedication to service back to their own practices and communities.