

LIFESTYLE // HEALTH &amp; FAMILY

## Need for pet food assistance up in San Antonio since government shutdown

**René A. Guzman**

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Meals on Wheels San Antonio volunteers Cathy Budzinski, her son Ian, 8, and her mother Rosario Budzinski deliver AniMeals for pets.

Photo: Carlos Javier Sanchez /Contributor

James and Earla Red Cloud Hill were used to sharing the Meals on Wheels deliveries they rely on five days a week with their four dogs and two cats. With that help, they had just enough

money to buy food for the other two days of the week – food they'd also share with their animals because they couldn't afford pet food.

But then a year ago, the senior couple saw an unexpected jump in the property taxes for their mobile home near Windcrest. Suddenly, the choice between how much they could eat and how much they could give their pets became even harder.

The solution came via an unexpected knock at the door, with Meals on Wheels volunteers bearing dog and cat food from the service's AniMeals pet food assistance program.

Speaking on behalf of her Chihuahuas Babie, Carmen and Cricket, her black cat Angel, her old pomeranian Pollyanna and her old Persian cat Bluebell, Earla Red Cloud Hill calls AniMeals a lifesaver.

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## **Where to donate pet food and other pet supplies in San Antonio**

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### **Animal Defense League of Texas**

11300 Nacogdoches Road or 210 Tuleta Drive, 210-655-1481, [adltexas.org](http://adltexas.org)

### **DaisyCares at the San Antonio Food Bank**

5200 Enrique M. Barrera Parkway

DaisyCares: 210-872-2343, [daisycares.com](http://daisycares.com)

San Antonio Food Bank: 210-337-3663, [safoodbank.org](http://safoodbank.org)

### **Haven for Hope**

1 Haven for Hope Way, 210-220-2100, [havenforhope.org](http://havenforhope.org)

### **Meals on Wheels San Antonio**

4306 N.W. Loop 410, 210-735-5115, [mowsatx.org](http://mowsatx.org)

### **San Antonio Humane Society**

4804 Fredericksburg Road, 210-226-7461, [sahumane.org](http://sahumane.org)

### **San Antonio Pets Alive!**

PO Box 830006, San Antonio 78283, 210-370-7612, [sanantoniopetsalive.org](http://sanantoniopetsalive.org)

## SNIPSA

PO Box 90325, San Antonio 78209, 210-237-9400, [snipsa.org](http://snipsa.org)

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“They’re my family,” Red Cloud Hill said of her pets. “Not only do they keep us company, they can pick up on our feelings. Because there are times when I’m really feeling down and everything, and they can pick up on that. They keep us both pretty happy.”

Sharing donated meals with pets is not unique to the Red Cloud Hills. It was something volunteers with Meals on Wheels and food banks around the country were seeing time and again for years, and that led to the founding of about 175 pet pantry and pet food assistance programs across the U.S., like AniMeals.

The need has increased recently in the wake of the government shutdown, which has sent many furloughed workers to seek help feeding their families and pets.

“It’s not an illogical leap to think, yes, if you can’t get food for yourself, how are you going to get food for your pets?” said Forrest Myane, chief development officer for Meals on Wheels San Antonio. “So if they’re sharing their food with their pets, they’re not getting all the nutrition they need, and the pets aren’t getting all the nutrition they need.”

### **On ExpressNews.com:** [San Antonio’s Pig Stand diner has a heart that won’t quit](#)

AniMeals, which launched in 2014, is one of several such programs in San Antonio, including the DaisyCares Pet Food Program run in a partnership between DaisyCares and the San Antonio Food Bank.

Meals on Wheels San Antonio is one of the 20 percent of U.S. Meals on Wheels programs that offers pet services. It makes monthly pet food deliveries to about 300 Meals on Wheels clients in San Antonio.

The well-being of those individuals often goes hand-in-paw with their pets. Myane said pets help offset loneliness and depression, which can affect the overall health of their owners — especially those too frail to leave their homes.

Such pet food assistance programs also help keep those animals in their homes rather than being surrendered to a shelter.

In 2009, during the Great Recession, attorney Ami Gordon launched DaisyCares, a nonprofit that provides pet food and veterinary care funds for pet owners in need.

It started at a time when she said pet surrender rates to Animal Care Services and other shelters had risen dramatically.

“I was inspired to help those parents keep their pets,” said Gordon, who named DaisyCares after her late Yorkie. “By providing pet food and vet care resources to families, they could also then have support during critical times so they could keep the pet with the family, and not surrender them at a time when you need them more than ever.”

Last year alone, DaisyCares provided pet food to 29,000 families through the San Antonio Food Bank’s network of more than 500 nonprofit partners in 16 counties.

**On ExpressNews.com:** [San Antonio doula Brian the Birth Guy delivers childbirth advice, support for new moms and dads](#)

Those seeking DaisyCares’ assistance just need to contact the organization or the San Antonio Food Bank, which will direct them to the nearest pet pantry. In the past few months, the Food Bank also has been offering food box and pet food delivery to low-income seniors, who often have a pet as their only companion.

A San Antonio mother of three, whose husband has been furloughed in the government shutdown, recently turned to the food bank to help feed her poodle mix.

The stay-at-home mom, who didn’t want to give her name, received a 15-pound bag of food for the dog and diapers for her 1-year-old daughter.

“It gives me peace of mind to know that there’s a place that I can go to and get the help that I need when I need it,” the mother said, “not only for my kids but also for my pet.”

Large or small, however, such pet food assistance programs still need help of their own.

DaisyCares gave out some 335,000 pounds of pet food last year, but Gordon said the demand for pet food always exceeds what it can provide.

AniMeals in San Antonio has a few partnerships with veterinary clinics that donate their overstock, Myane said, but it relies mostly on volunteers to donate pet food, repackage it for distribution and deliver it to Meals on Wheels recipients.

Those volunteers, such as Cathy Budzinski and her son Ian, 8, often are pet owners themselves who know how vital animals are to their owners.

“Some of the people that are on our route, their dogs are like their kids,” said Budzinski, who has two blind rescue dogs herself.

**On ExpressNews.com:** [South Texas' most famous hedgehog Wilbur stealing the hearts of animal lovers all over](#)

The Budzinskis can't help but get attached to their clients' pets, too. Last year, Ian dipped into his own birthday money to give the Red Cloud Hills pet food for Thanksgiving and the holidays.

On a recent Saturday morning at the Red Cloud Hills, Ian got some extra thanks, courtesy of many grateful licks from Babie, the elderly Chihuahua.

“It's one thing to donate,” Budzinski said, “but when (Ian) sees these people and how much they light up, he gets it. He sees how what he's doing is so important.”

It's the kind of goodwill the Red Cloud Hills strive to share with others who could use a helping hand with their own furry family members.

“Not only does it help me out,” Red Cloud Hill said outside her mobile home as she cuddled a shivering Babie, “but there's people here that has dogs that can't afford food. So what mine doesn't eat, I give to them.”

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