

Profiles in Giving

by Jennifer Barrows

Our Companions is fortunate to have a dedicated group of volunteers and donors. Through their stories featured in this section, we hope you will become inspired to help animals in your own way.

Charlotte Kinlock

When Charlotte Kinlock and her wife, Anne Stanback, recently presented a \$100,000 gift to Our Companions, it represented not only a major development milestone, but also a tangible vote of confidence for the organization and its mission.

“This was the largest single donation we have received to date, and we are grateful beyond expression,” said Our Companions CEO Susan Linker.

Anyone’s first inclination is to be floored by such a gift. But knowing Charlotte and her bigger-than-life spirit, it’s become clear that when she believes in something, she puts her whole heart into it.

“She’s an amazing person who gives not only of her financial resources, but of her time and talent,” remarked Susan. In recent years, Charlotte has made a tremendous contribution through her involvement on the Our Companions Board of Directors and in facilitating the strategic planning process.

For Charlotte, finding Our Companions was like coming home. Years ago, she had learned about the well-known Utah sanctuary called Best Friends and was thrilled with the idea of unwanted animals’ having a place to go to be sheltered and loved. She dreamed of such a place for Connecticut.

“About two years ago, I picked up a Hartford Courant, and there was an article about a new animal sanctuary planned for the Ashford area,” explained Charlotte. “I told Anne that this was an organization I wanted to support and get involved with. We met with Susan Linker, and the rest, as they say, is history.”

As Our Companions marks its 5-year anniversary, this monetary acknowledgment could not have come at a better time.

“The most immediate and concrete benefit of this gift is in moving us closer toward breaking ground on Rescue Cottage Number 1,” said Susan. “Less tangible, but no less important, is the mental and emotional benefit such a gift bestows. It means so much to be told, ‘We believe in this organization, and we share in your dream of its greater mission,’ in such a powerful way,” continued Susan.



Our Companions is hopeful that this donation will set a benchmark for larger giving by those who have the means and who might enjoy being involved with the organization.

“We will always be reliant on smaller gifts —and we know that they absolutely reflect the same kind of heart-felt generosity exhibited by Charlotte and Anne. Gifts, large or small, all make a difference for the animals,” Susan said.

As for Charlotte and Anne, the joy they share can only be matched by the elation they feel to be a part of this organization. “After giving Our Companions smaller gifts in recent years, it was time to put our money where our mouths were,” explained Charlotte. “Every capital campaign, to be truly successful, needs someone to take the plunge and say, ‘Yes, I believe in you.’ I feel extraordinarily blessed that I was given such an opportunity. How many of us get to be a part of actualizing a dream?”

Charlotte is also quick to point out that, in her mind, financial contributions, no matter their size, pale in comparison to the dedication expressed by Our Companions staff, volunteers and the Board of Directors. Indeed, all of these facets are integral to a healthy and vibrant organization.

One major project Charlotte has led (when wearing her volunteer hat) is Our Companions’ strategic planning process. Since May of this year, members of the staff, volunteers, and Board of Directors have been meeting twice monthly to look at the structural aspects, mission and programs of the organization. The goal is to formulate a plan that will take Our Companions through the next three to five years. Labor intensive, the work is expected to continue through the end of this year.

“It’s very easy in non-profit work, with the never-ending cycle of need, to become more and more reactionary, merely responding to one crisis after another,” says Charlotte. “It’s important to take a step back and ask some basic questions, for example, ‘Are these the most effective and efficient services to address the issues? How can we partner with other groups to maximize resources? What do we do well and how can we do it better?’”

“Unless an organization is willing to take a close look at the issues, it will have only limited success, and it certainly won’t be able to plan, execute and achieve a \$15 million sanctuary project. Our Companions’ willingness to plan, ask the hard questions and make the necessary adjustments to programs makes the organization unique in the animal welfare world. But then Our Companions is more than ‘just’ a sanctuary,” says Charlotte.

Charlotte believes strongly that through such services as the trap/ neuter/return feral cat program, the HelpLine program (which educates callers and helps them find solutions for their animal problems), and its unique canine behavioral programs, the very face of animal welfare is being changed. “Our Companions is a leader of the no-kill movement in Connecticut. In ten or twenty years we will all look back with amazement at the leadership and vision of Our Companions. We are working toward nothing less than changing society’s very basic paradigm of how it views and treats animals.”

It’s an effort to which Charlotte is committed. “I feel so fortunate that I have something of value, beyond money, to offer to Our Companions. It sometimes feels like my entire professional life has led me to this point, where the skills and experiences I have gained over the last 30 years now allow me to help those I’ve cared about my entire life—animals. Indirectly, I help save the lives of animals. What more rewarding work can there be than that?”

Susan says that Our Companions first cottage will debut next year and that ultimately 16 cottages will shelter about 2,000 companion animals each year. Our Companions has also been building the human infrastructure and currently has five employees (3 full time and 2 part time), an 18-person Board of Directors and over 130 active volunteers.

Susan Linker reflects, “We all love working with Charlotte—her enthusiasm is infectious.” Susan is hopeful that Charlotte’s future involvement might include channeling this enthusiasm to help inspire additional major donors.

“Once they get to know Our Companions, they won’t be able to say no,” says Charlotte. “It sure worked for us. It’s an easy sell—how can you turn down an organization with this kind of leadership and such a worthwhile mission?”

We thank you, Charlotte and Anne, for your steadfast dedication to animals and for choosing Our Companions as a recipient of your generous public giving. Most of all, we thank you for sharing our dream—the dream of ensuring that no pet should ever be without a loving and supportive home environment.

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-Charlotte Kinlock