

A Guinea Pig Rescue Prepares For A Large Intake

Piggie Poo guinea pig rescue in Arizona prepares to receive up to 100 rescued guinea pigs.

By Marylou Zarbock

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Courtesy Wee Companions Small Animal Adoption Inc.

Once they are deemed healthy enough, these rescued baby guinea pigs could be among those headed to a new foster network to await forever homes.

Early in September 2011, Wee Companions Small Animal Adoption Inc. and Orange County Cavy Haven took in a total of 152 guinea pigs from the Baldwin Park Animal Care Center in Southern California. The guinea pigs were dropped off by one owner.

This intake brought Wee Companions to more than 300 guinea pigs in its network of foster homes and Orange County Cavy Haven to 113. Both rescues reported that the guinea pigs had several health concerns, including mites and malnutrition. Members of the guinea pig community and other small animal rescues in California and Arizona are offering assistance. Piggie Poo in Arizona is one such rescue; it has offered to take in up to 100 guinea pigs, which it expects to begin arriving near the end of the month.

So how does a small animal rescue prepare for such large numbers of animals? Amanda Peterson, president and founder of Piggie Poo, said the first priority is to raise funds for feed, housing and veterinary costs. She anticipates that the rescue will invest \$20 per guinea pig during the intake process, which could last up to six weeks. The guinea pigs will then likely live in foster homes for up to 16 weeks, she said. Piggie Poo provides the foster families with everything needed to care for the guinea pigs, including housing, bedding and feed.

"We also do our best to solicit donations of food and housing from vendors we work with regularly," Peterson said. Those vendors include Bunny Basics in Scottsdale, which donates the bulk of its profits to its bunny sanctuary, Tranquility Trails, the Stock Shop in Glendale, Arizona Country Feeds in Tucson and the Petco Foundation.

Peterson said that in addition to fundraising, Piggie Poo coordinates with current volunteers, space plans foster homes and habitats, and accepts applications for new foster families, who receive training and supplies.

Piggie Poo has the capacity to house more than 120 small animals, and Peterson expects that the network can take care of each guinea pig from this rescue until it is placed. "We have had a wonderfully successful summer adoption program and have space available." Piggie Poo currently has 26 guinea pigs in foster care, but that number usually runs in the 60s and 80s.

But this doesn't mean the task will be easy. "An intake this large takes a lot of coordination and planning, not to mention 100 guinea pigs need people to feed them, snuggle them, drive them to the vet and simply care for their every need," Peterson said. "There are many volunteer opportunities available, other than fostering, and with our adoption centers located at many Petco stores around the Valley we even have need for teen volunteers to help the directors manage these events."

Piggie Poo usually rescues more than 400 small animal pets each year. Besides volunteers, funds are critical. "It's difficult for us to be completely self-supporting with adoption donations and monies from other programs," Peterson said. "We are heavily dependent on the community's generosity and have always been blessed, and we are truly thankful for all the support." The Piggie Poo website lists more ways to help.

The wait for the guinea pigs continues while preparations go ahead full-force. Peterson is already thinking ahead to how the guinea pigs will be transported. "We will most likely rent a cargo van from Enterprise Rent-A-Car and transport the guinea pigs in carriers. It would be lovely if Enterprise donated the rental costs!"

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