

Well-Made Beds

Volunteers blanket animal shelters across the country with handcrafted comfort. **BY JILL GLEESON**

It really all started with a kitten. Linda Kastiel Kozlowski, the founder of Comfort for Critters, was in her local animal shelter adopting the meowing ball of fuzz when she noticed the rest of the homeless pets in their enclosures. She was helping one, but what could she do for the other 50 she couldn't take with her? Inspiration came when the shelter worker told her they sometimes lined the cages with old towels to make the animals more comfortable.

"I'm a Christian," Linda says, "and I felt a tap on my shoulder to do something about all these pets. I had been crocheting my whole life, so I said, 'How about I crochet blankets and you can use that instead of old towels?' I was really answering a calling I had."

That first year, the busy mother of two, who manages a custom drapery business, made about 50 blankets and then gave them to the shelter free of charge. The shelter sent the blankets home with newly adopted pets, providing something familiar as they adjusted to their new family.

Linda kept crocheting, and within a few years, she was donating her handiwork to six shelters around her hometown of Glen Ellyn, Illinois. Word of her good deeds spread locally. As soon as she put up the Comfort for Critters website, word spread

A stack of 233 blankets made by a Comfort for Critters volunteer measures nearly as tall as founder Linda Kastiel Kozlowski.



even farther, reaching across the country. People joined her in the mission—first in a trickle, then in a flood.

Today, 14 years after she made her first blanket, Linda's organization boasts about 1,000 volunteers nationwide. They service shelters in every state—a total of around 400 by Linda's last count. In 2020, Comfort for Critters provided 20,023 blankets made from donated yarn, all of them used to provide warm, soft bedding for homeless pets, all of them crafted by hand.

"We feel like making the

blankets is really an exercise in love for the volunteers," Linda says. "They think about the pets in the shelter they'll be helping as they crochet. So they really pour themselves into it. It's turned out to be almost as big a blessing to the volunteers as it has the pets."

Linda says she's always happy to see new volunteers join up with Comfort for Critters, but the organization is especially in need of yarn right now. To donate your extra yarn (partial skeins and leftovers are welcomed) or to become a volunteer crocheter, visit comfortforcritters.org. ■

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