



New York animal rescue group sets out for Camden



By [Jason Laday/South Jersey Times](#)

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Members of Guardians of Rescue in Camden, January 2013. (Special to the South Jersey Times/Guardians of Rescue)

[CAMDEN](#) — Guardians of Rescue wants people to understand that the culture of violence in Camden doesn't stop at humans.

"We've talked to people who have seen kids think nothing about running over a stray dog or cat with their car, or throwing bricks at them," said Robert Misseri, founder of the Long Island-based group, formed in 2010 to help animals in need wherever they are.

Since their founding, Guardians of Rescue have brought dogs back from war zones in Afghanistan for returning soldiers, and rescued pets and other animals during the aftermath of Hurricane Sandy.

Now, they're looking to set up shop in downtown Camden, where members plan to provide education to the public, as well as help with micro-chipping animals and offer free vaccinations and pet supplies.

"We're not going to go into someone's yard, write them up for a violation and confiscate their dog, because then they'll just get another dog," said Misseri, speaking Thursday on the phone from Manhattan. "We're going to go to homes where we see, say, a dog chained up or roped up without any shelter, and ask what we can do

"We'll give them a doghouse — a heated doghouse — or pet food, anything that will help that dog live a better life."

Five members of the group visited Camden for the first time last week, speaking with residents and seeking out stray animal populations. Their SWAT-style jackets and SUVs at first seemed to put many people off, with some outright fleeing their approach.

"But once they realized what we were, and that we were trying to help, they came back and we got such a welcome from people," said Misseri. "There are countless dogs on chains, and a lot of them need medical attention.

"There are also stray animals all over the streets."

Part of the group's resources will be put toward going door-to-door. However, their volunteers will also be working with Camden's homeless population, offering clothing and gift cards to grocery stores in exchange for information and help in caring for stray animals.

"It's going to be a barter system, for information leading to animals in need," said Misseri. "Because, we know we're not going to be able to see everything, and what really concerns us is what goes unseen — all the cases of abuse that go unreported.

"We know it's a risk, we know that a lot of our rescues are probably going to be at night, but as far as we know, no one else is doing this."

In addition to establishing a new office in Camden, Guardians of Rescue hopes to launch an advertisement campaign on television, radio and billboards, spreading their message of humane animal treatment in the city.

"We have some famous hip-hop artists that will be featured," said Misseri. "I can't say who, but they reached out to us, saying that they have roots in New Jersey and they like what we're doing."

Misseri stated he hopes Guardians of Rescue's work could one day "have a ripple effect" on the city as a whole.

"This is clearly a city that needs a lot of help in many ways," he said. "People need help, the animals need help, and we need to do something.

"If we can make a difference with the animal population in Camden, which is what we specialize in, then we believe it will have a ripple effect and have a positive influence on the rest of the community."

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