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## Happy New Year to our Flock!!

By Michelle Yesney, CEO



Happy New Year to all of you - our volunteers, supporters, and lovers of birds. To all of you that work to rescue, succor and provide forever homes to the birds of Mickaboo!

In many ways, this has been a very good year. Not least of the reasons for that is the happy news that our adoptions exceeded our intake of birds this year. All of the work that so many of you put into getting birds adopted is working. Given that success, I thought I should provide a little more explanation about how Mickaboo's finances work, so you can better understand why this news is critical to our survival.

First, a very short historical summary....

For the first twelve years or so of our existence, Mickaboo survived in a classic "hand-to-mouth" existence. We raised money as we needed it, and the more birds we took in, the more we needed to raise. It is absolutely incredible, looking back on that time, that Tammy and a handful of volunteers managed to keep the organization afloat. I've heard stories from a few of our avian vets about what happened when a charge to Mickaboo's credit card was declined and the degree to which we survived on sympathy and frantic fundraising.

Progress was made - we found volunteers to create a website, to transport birds and cages for sometimes amazing distances, and our vets kept working with us. At about this time Nancy Powell and some hardworking volunteers established the "species coordinator" teams to better organize how we tracked our birds and our volunteers. The strong sense of ownership and accountability in those early coordinators made it possible to take in more birds. More birds meant that fundraising became even more desperately necessary, and we experienced the terrible need for moratoria - when we had to suspend intake because we were afraid we couldn't care for the birds we still had in foster homes.

Then Matt Linton came along and our website maintenance got better and we also were able to create for the first time a definitive data management system. The other person who became important to Mickaboo in this same timeframe was Pam Lee. Pam made fundraising a full-time responsibility and in doing so, gave us an idea of what was possible. Mickaboo has never been a wealthy charity, but Pam introduced a new level of responsible money management and showed us how to diversify. She oversees everything from recycling printer cartridges and old clothes, to regular mailings and preparing our tax returns (yes, even nonprofits have to do tax returns).

Parallel to this organizational evolution, we slowly increased our fundraising. While the numbers of birds that we take in annually has not increased substantially over the years, the numbers of adoptions have not kept pace, especially in the last few years. As a result, we have a significant number of birds that have been with Mickaboo for more than two years. An additional complication has been an increase in birds with severe health problems, such as the conures from the Telegraph Hill flock, and the horribly ill flock of canaries from a recent rescue.

About two years ago, a bird lover in San Francisco died and left her house to Mickaboo. The money from its sale gave us our first opportunity to establish an endowment - a bequest that can be used to help support a charitable organization over time. But for an endowment to function as planned, it must be protected so

that it can generate income to support the organization. And while the Board has invested the bequest, the growth in vet bills has required that we use some of those funds (about \$200,000 this year) to pay our bills.

As generous as our donors continue to be in supporting Mickaboo - and as we have been telling all of you regularly over the last few years - our vet bills are now regularly exceeding \$40,000 a month. The main reasons for this growth in costs has been (1) the severity of the health problems we're dealing with, and (2) the size of our "permanent" flock.

Some of the extra money we hoped would function as an endowment for the future has therefore been used to pay our vet bills. In addition, we have declared a "partial moratorium" -- our coordinators are requiring "voluntary surrenderers" of healthy birds to take responsibility for their birds and try to place the bird independently (and we offer help on behavior problems). That meant we didn't have to declare a full moratorium and refuse to take in birds at risk, but we are eroding our chance of having a financially secure future. If we continue at this rate, we will eventually be faced with having hundreds of birds and no way to pay our bills.

As we discussed last year at this time, we have to do a better job of getting our birds adopted out. For the four years prior to 2017, we had taken in substantially more birds than we had adopted out - as many as 100 more birds per year.

**BUT THIS YEAR, IT IS THE NOT SAME STORY. WE TOOK IN 223 BIRDS AND ADOPTED OUT 233 BIRDS!!!!**

Our volunteers held adoption fairs and worked harder than ever to find adopters for the beautiful, wonderful birds that we have. And your efforts are working.

Mickaboo currently has 656 birds in foster care - the largest number in our 20-year history. But we can see what is needed to give ourselves and our birds a viable future, and we have started down that path.